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THE SPY WITH THE BLUE KAZOO

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They ran down the corridor toward the pad of Fatima al-Mut'ah, daughter of Islam and Miss Wadi-el-Aicair of 1964.

"The door is ajar!" Regina marveled.

"It's also sort of open," Randy Kidd agreed. Drawing his trusty P-38 automatic, he kicked the door the rest of the way open and sailed in, ready for anything. Anything except what he found.

"Accursed Israeli onanist!" Fatima was murmuring. "I hate you! I despise you! I loathe you! Do it again!"

"Arabian harlot!" David ben Schikza growled, biting her on the neck. "I would rather make love to a *pig* than a goddamn Arab! But since there are no pigs in this bed . . ."

"Excuse me," Randy said. "Have either of you seen Doctor Fang the foul fiend? We'd sort of like to catch him, before he like infects the world with his Aphroditic Plague."

Fatima opened her eyes, looked Randy over, and sighed, "Mmmmm, you'll have to wait your turn, handsome infidel—but stick around!"

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DAGMAR...

THE SPY WITH THE BLUE KAZOO

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THE SPY WITH THE BLUE KAZOO

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Chapter ONE

It was raining in Los Perros. A hard tropical downpour that drove right through your clothes and chilled you with its clammy fingers. But the henna-rinsed stripper wasn't wearing clothes, and the cool drops pounding down on her naked flesh didn't bother her. Nothing bothered here, any more. She was like dead.

The police photographers had already taken her picture, hanging there on the wrought-iron fence, but the ambulance was having trouble making it across town in the storm. Or maybe they'd stopped off for a couple of drinks. The girl on the fence was in no hurry, and the police call had probably informed the morgue attendants that this DOA was a messy one. Like, falling seven stories onto a wrought-iron fence would have been messy in any case, even without the six-inch spikes. It was the spike through her head that made people want a stiff drink, even before they looked.

It wasn't so bad from Randy Kidd's window. She looked something like a crumpled pink celluloid doll from seven stories up, and it wouldn't have made the sardonic American nearly as sick as he felt, gazing down on her from his hotel window, if she hadn't jumped from that same window.

"Okay, Kidd," One of the men in the room growled, "you've had your view of the local scenery. Suppose you tell us, one more time, how it got there."

Randy Kidd turned around to face the others. It wasn't clear which of them had spoken. There were four CIA types in the room, in addition to the local fuzz, and nobody, nobody at all, looked as if he believed one word Randy had said.

Kidd shrugged, took a cigarette out of his Hawaiian-print shirt pocket, lit it with maddening deliberation, blew a smoke ring thoughtfully across the room at them,

and said, "I've played it from the top, boys. Like three times in a row. If you don't like my tune, blow your own."

One of the local fuzz, a wiry guy in crumpled damp khaki, muttered something he couldn't possibly have known about Randy Kidd's sex life and slapped him across the mouth.

The tall American wiped a hand across his mouth, stared absently at the blood on his fingertips, and said, quite pleasantly, "You do that again, friend, and I'll break your arm."

The cop sneered and drew back his lean brown hand for another swipe. And then, something glittering deep in mocking green eyes of Randy Kidd told the cop, who was a reasonably well-educated street brawler, that he'd pressed his luck about as far as it was going to go. He muttered something very vile and let his hand drop to his side with a fatalistic shrug.

Before anyone could fill the awkward silence, there was a knock on the door. One of the CIA men opened it to admit a little brown sparrow of a man wearing a filthy raincoat and carrying a medical kit. The oldest-looking CIA man frowned at him and asked, "You examine her, Doc?"

"As well as I could, until they work her off that mess of wrought-iron spikes." The sparrow nodded. "She had the marks on her skin, and there was, ah, evidence of sexual intercourse just prior to death."

He looked admiringly at Randy Kidd and added, "A rather unusual *amount* of, ah, evidence, by the way."

"Okay, Kidd, hold out your arm." The head CIA man ordered. "We'll let Doc here take a blood sample while we talk, huh?"

Randy shrugged, held his left forearm out to allow the medical examiner to tie a tourniquet of rubber tubing just above the elbow, and said, "Be my guest, Count Dracula."

The little brown sparrow didn't laugh. Either he'd heard the joke too many times, or he just didn't have a sense of humor. He inserted a needle into Randy's dis-

tended vein and slowly drew a larger than normal serology sample as the head CIA man said, "How does the Blue Queen figure in this, Kidd?"

"The Blue *who?*"

"Come on, we know you play the piano for Regina."

"Six nights a week." Randy nodded. "On Monday night, I'm on my own. Like, this is Monday night, dad."

"And Regina, the torch at Casino Cabrones, is the Blue Queen. Who are you working for this time, Kidd? And how did the two of you get a line on Doctor Fang?"

"That's a name?"

"That's the name of the man we're *all* after."

"Doctor Fang . . ." Randy marveled. "You've got to be kidding."

"Take another look out that window, friend, and tell us if you think what you see down there is funny," the CIA man who'd opened the door for the medical examiner growled.

Randy Kidd smiled thinly and replied, "I looked out a window one time. Bad scene. You say this Doctor Fang had something to do with that?"

"Maybe." The older one nodded. He looked at the medical examiner in silent questioning as he added, "Maybe you're about to join the lady on an adjoining slab. You'd better come clean, Kidd. This thing's bigger than the usual thing you and the Blue Queen handle. You're tangled with some of the nastiest international criminals in history, and no matter how much anyone else has offered you, it won't do either one of you a bit of good when they pat those last shovelsful of dirt down on your faces."

"For the fourth, or maybe fifth, time," Randy Kidd sighed, "I've never seen that kooky little broad before tonight, and I've never heard of any weirdo named Fang."

"Doctor Fang, of Peking University," his questioner corrected. "And I don't suppose you've ever heard of the Blue Queen, either, have you?"

The sardonic American musician took a deep drag on his cigarette, blew another smoke ring, and smiled mock-

ingly as he replied, "What's a Blue Queen, dad?"

As if in answer to his question, the door opened and there, outlined in the doorway, stood a stunning platinum blond, wearing a saphire tiara and an electric-blue satin evening gown that hugged every curve of her lushly feminine body like a spray job. Her pale blue catlike eyes surveyed the room full of men calmly, as if she was quite used to finding her accompanist's room cluttered with fuzz, and her generous, carmine-lipped mouth smiled bright as a new penny as Regina, International Star of Stage, Screen, and Recording, quipped, "Anyone for tennis?"

"Speak of the devil." The CIA man in charge of the happening smiled. It was easy to smile at Regina. She was one of the most beautiful women on the face of the earth. But that didn't prevent a certain amount of coldness from entering the man's voice as he continued, "We were just talking about you, Miss Regina. Doc, make sure you take a sample of her blood while you're at it."

Regina arched an eyebrow at the medical examiner, who was busily studying a slide smeared with Randy Kidd's blood through a small but powerful microscope he'd set up on the end table along with the rest of his portable serology lab. She asked, "Randy, darling, have you been naughty again?"

"No more than usual," her accompanist admitted somewhat sheepishly. "They seem to think I threw a redhead out the window."

"I saw her downstairs." Regina nodded, as if she were jaded with the dull monotony of seeing naked women spitted on wrought-iron fences. "Was she pretty? Before she landed, I mean."

"She was okay." Randy sighed. "Sort of kooky, but I guess you might say she was a looker. We, ah, were sort of having a nightcap together, when *zowie!* Out the window, just like that!"

"Just like that?" Regina frowned. "Didn't she even say what was bothering her?"

"Didn't even say goodbye. I mean, there we were, sort of, ah, holding hands on that couch, and all of a sudden she jumps to her feet, runs around the ceiling a couple of times, and dives head-first out the open window. That was when I called you. Just before I called the local fuzz. I don't know *how* these cats from the embassy got into the act."

"Everybody *always* wants to get into the act, poor darling," Regina soothed.

Before Randy could answer, one of the CIA men picked up a limp lavender print dress that had been lying on the floor between a pair of overturned silver slippers and a size twenty-three garterbelt and said, "You were just holding hands, eh?"

"It was a warm night," Randy Kidd answered innocently.

Before anyone could answer that, the medical examiner looked up from his microscope and said, "He's okay. Blood type O with a positive on the Diego factor. Lucky about that Amerind ancestor, Kidd."

"I've got an American Indian ancestor?" Kidd blinked, glancing at Regina. The blue-eyed blond looked blankly back at him and shrugged.

The medical examiner said, "You must have had an Indian somewhere in the woodpile, or maybe a Chinese, to come up with type-O Diego-positive blood. I'm ready for you, now, Miss Regina."

Regina pouted sulkily at the head CIA man and asked, "Do I have to, sweety?"

"Unless you want to go down to the embassy for your passport," the burly agent growled. Then he added, "That ought to be a week or so at the least, if the local police decide to run you in."

"On what charge?" Randy cut in, innocently.

"Suspicion of homicide, as a starter," the man in the damp khakis snapped in a slight Spanish accent.

"Me too?" Regina purred. "I was at the club when all this happened, you know."

"We know." The policeman smiled. It wasn't a nice smile as he added, "But we'll think of something, unless you're ready to cooperate with your own authorities."

"Why, Lieutenant, I do think you're a tool of Yankee imperialism." Regina laughed, holding out her smooth white arm and saying, "Be careful, darling. I bruise easily."

The medical examiner went to work with his serology kit as the head CIA man said in a desperately casual tone, "Mr. Kidd, here, tells us the two of you are working on the Doctor Fang thing."

"Are we?" Regina dimpled, looking over at her accompanist with a what-the-hell-are-we-talking-about? expression in her feline eyes.

Randy shrugged and said, "Sounds like something Hoagy Carmichael might have written, doesn't it?"

"How do the lyrics go?" Regina asked, neither wincing nor deigning to glance down as the medical examiner drove the needle into her soft white flesh.

"They start in Red China and segue all the way down here in Central America," the head CIA man answered dryly. "I don't suppose either of you would care to sing us the rest of it?"

"We would if we could, darlings," Regina purred, throwing him a look that would have steamed his glasses if he'd been wearing any. Downstairs in the street below a siren wailed a blue note as it carried the mangled body of the henna-rinsed stripper to its cold, cold table.

The CIA man listened, head cocked slightly to one side, and it wasn't clear whether he listened to the siren or waited for a few more bars from Regina until he said, "But you can't, eh? Okay. Let's say we buy it. Let's say we accept Mr. Kidd's story about picking this girl up in the hotel bar and—"

"I did not pick *her* up," Randy corrected, with an indignant look. "She picked *me* up. Or maybe I ought to say she sort of followed me home wagging her tail behind her." He smiled sheepishly at Regina and added, "Honestly, honey, the kooky little broad followed me up

in the elevator. I mean, what was I supposed to do? There's such a thing as common courtesy, you know."

"Even to a nymphomaniac," Regina agreed gravely, but with a roguish twinkle in her eye that only Randy could see.

The medical examiner glanced up from his microscope and said in a thoughtful tone, "Miss, ah, Regina has type-O blood."

The head CIA man cocked an eyebrow and, without taking his eyes from the statuesque blond, asked, "Diego positive?"

"Diego positive. Another Mongoloid ancestor, someplace."

"I had a Cherokee great grandmother," Regina observed, trying to be helpful.

The CIA men exchanged glances and then their leader said in a disgusted voice, "And neither of you have ever heard of Doctor Fang or his little friends, eh?"

"He's got little friends?" Randy asked blankly.

"Okay. We'll play it your way, for now." The CIA man sighed. "We'll accept the fact that you just happened to be here in Los Perros, playing a club date at the Casino Cabrones. And we'll even accept the fact that Mr. Kidd's lady of the evening was a chance pickup. But . . . hell's bells, Doc, what are the chances of two Caucasians just happening to have identical serology?"

"As rare as type-O Diego factor positive with predominantly Europoid genetics?" The medical examiner mused. He pursed his lips and shrugged. "I'd say about one in a million."

"That's what I thought." The C.I.A. man nodded. To Regina, he added, "Okay, lady, you want to tough this through on your lonesome; don't holler for help from Uncle Sam when the going gets rough. Fang and his bunch are bad boys, and you're going to get hurt. Hurt permanent, I mean. Come on, guys."

"*Uno momento*," The local police lieutenant cut in as the others prepared to leave. "Does this mean the United States Government does not wish to hold these two?"

"This means the United States Government is washing its hands of them," the CIA man growled. "Since they don't seem willing to cooperate, as of this moment they're on their own."

"We are not finished with our own investigation." The police officer frowned. "But we shall leave, too, for the moment. I would not advise either of you to leave Los Perros without our permission. *Comprende?*"

"*Comprendo* the most." Randy Kidd shrugged, ushering the whole mob out the door. He waited until he and Regina were alone before turning to her and saying, "Okay, doll, who's this Doctor Fang?"

"Don't you know?" Regina frowned, her showgirl cool gone now that she and the only person she ever allowed inside her glittering personal shell of charm were alone at last.

"Honestly, kitten," Randy insisted, "it happened just like I told them. This silly broad came up here—"

"For a nightcap?"

"Okay. So we spent a little time in the feathers. I mean, you said yourself it was common courtesy, and *you* won't—"

"Down, boy. Let's stick to the facts. I know about your prowess as a bedroom athlete. Let's figure out what made her kill herself. I take it she was slightly boiled?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I don't know. You know how the poem goes. 'Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker.' "

"I don't work that way," Randy said primly. His eyes clouded as he added, "How come I can't seem to get it through your blond skull that there *are* a few women in this world who *do* think I'm hot stuff?"

"A *few?*" Regina laughed. "Stick to the facts, don Juan. Who was this redhead? What was her name?"

"Yvette DuVal, according to the DOA tag they put on her big toe. What's what they told me, anyway. We, ah, hadn't got around to last names before she dove."

"French?" Regina asked.

"Guess so. Had a French accent, anyway. Guy down

at the desk says she's been working in a strip joint over on the other side of the river. Tough section, the way I hear it."

"That where you picked her up?"

"No. It was like I said. We met in the elevator."

"And she followed you to your room? Just like that?"

"Just like that. Damn near killed me before she killed herself. I mean, I've met some sexy broads in my time, but this Yvette was something else."

"Spare me the details, lover," Regina said, wrinkling her nose in mock fastidiousness. "Let's stick to the bare facts. Aside from the fact of her bare body going out your window, that is. Did she make any, ah, financial arrangements?"

"That was a low blow," Randy Kidd growled. "You know I don't work that way. I'm telling you, Regina, the silly dame followed me right into the room, made mad Gypsy love to me for, oh, an hour or so, and went absobloodylutely nuts. Said something about not being able to stand something any longer and went right out the window like a big bird! I mean, it was sort of a surprise."

"I imagine it would be." Regina frowned. "Now, all we have to figure out is how this Doctor Fang killed her."

"What's to figure? The nutty chick killed herself."

"Maybe. But the CIA doesn't seem to think so, and it just occurred to me, Randy, that we might be in serious trouble."

"Who with?" Randy snorted. "We're not working on this Fang case."

"I know that." Regina nodded. "And you know that. But does Doctor Fang know that?"

Chapter TWO

It was nine in the morning before Lieutenant Fernando Gonzales, known to his friends on the Los Perros Metropolitan Police Force as Speedy, was able to get away long enough to make a clandestine visit to a certain address his superiors might have felt a trifle uneasy about, had they known where he was going or that his name was really Ivan Teratitov.

Gonzales-Teratitov spent perhaps an hour reporting to his *real* superiors before getting back to the office. By the time the man in rumpled khaki was back on his beat, an urgent message had been sent to a place called Moscow, via diplomatic channels.

URGENTLY REQUEST INFORMATION ON BLUE QUEEN. WHAT OR WHO IS BLUE QUEEN? WHAT CONNECTION DOES SAME HAVE WITH AMERICAN CIA?

Another hour went by before the return message was sent.

BLUE QUEEN IS CHESS TERM. USED ONLY BY CHESS MASTERS IN GAME PLAYED FOR OWN AMUSEMENT CALLED "FAIRY CHESS." BLUE QUEEN IS EXTRA PIECE PLACED IN CENTER OF BOARD AT BEGINNING OF GAME. CAN BE PLAYED BY EITHER OPPONENT IN TURN. IN OTHER WORDS, BLUE QUEEN ON NEITHER SIDE BUT LIABLE TO TAKE ANY PAWN ON EITHER SIDE. CONTRARIWISE, BLUE QUEEN LIABLE TO BE TAKEN AT ANY TIME BY ANY PAWN ON EITHER SIDE. COLONEL CHAVOSKY REQUESTS REASON FOR SUDDEN INTEREST IN FAIRY CHESS.

The man in Los Perros who received the wire stared at it for a long time, digesting what it said and what Gonzales-Teratitov had reported about the mysterious death of the French secret agent the night before. Then he sighed and sent the following reply.

IS NOT GAME OF CHESS IN LOS PERROS. IS MURDER OR SUICIDE OF FRENCH SECRET AGENT MARIE ARNOULD, ALIAS YVETTE DUVAL, COVER STORY STRIPPER IN LOW-CLASS DIVE. JUMPED OR FELL FROM LEADING HOTEL LAST NIGHT. CONNECTED IN SOME WAY WITH NOTORIOUS DOCTOR FANG, WHEREABOUTS STILL UNKNOWN. TWO AMERICANS INVOLVED IN CASE. REGINA, NIGHTCLUB SINGER, AND RANDY KIDD, ACCOMPANIST. KIDD WITH FRENCH AGENT AT TIME OF DEATH. CIA MAN ACCUSED REGINA, IN PRESENCE OF AGENT TERATITOV, OF BEING SOMETHING OR SOMEONE CALLED THE BLUE QUEEN. INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH OF SOVIET AGENTS AND DISAPPEARANCE OF FANG FROM HONG KONG HIDEAWAY CONTINUES.

This time, the reply from Moscow was urgent and to the point.

COMRADES! PROCEED WITH EXTREME CAUTION! ENTRY OF THE BLUE QUEEN INTO CASE POSES A NEW AND UNKNOWN THREAT. COLONEL CHAVOSKY ADVISES LIQUIDATION OF BOTH REGINA AND HER ACCURSED PIANO-PLAYING ASSISTANT, RANDY KIDD, AS SOON AS YOU DISCOVER WHO ASSIGNED THEM TO PURSUIT OF DOCTOR FANG, IF THEY KNOW HIS WHEREABOUTS. SINCE, IN MY OPINION, THIS WILL

PROBABLY PROVE AS IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOUR AGENTS AS IT DID FOR OUR BERLIN, CAIRO, TEHRAN, TEL AVIV, AND OTHER OFFICES, IT IS MY PERSONAL ADVICE THAT YOU EITHER SEND THEM A BOMB OR EVACUATE THE AREA.

FOLLOWING IS DOSSIER CONTAINING WHAT LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT BLUE QUEEN AND ASSISTANT.

REGINA, ALIAS THE BLUE QUEEN, IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS FREELANCE AGENT OF UNKNOWN AGE, NATIONALITY, TRAINING, AND LOYALTY. TRAVELS ON AMERICAN PASSPORT AND CLAIMS TO HAVE BEEN RAISED IN AMERICAN MIDDLE WEST. NO BIRTH RECORDS SUBSTANTIATE THIS. OUR AGENTS HAVE SEARCHED IN VAIN FOR PERSON OR PERSONS WHO "KNEW HER WHEN." ALL THAT IS KNOWN FOR CERTAIN ABOUT THE BLUE QUEEN IS THAT HER APPEARANCE USUALLY MEANS TROUBLE. WAS SINGING AT SHEPPERD'S HOTEL, CAIRO, AT TIME OF SUEZ CRISIS. ACCUSED OF BEING ISRAELI SPY BY EGYPT. AT THE SAME TIME, ISRAEL CHARGED SHE AND RANDY KIDD WERE WORKING FOR EGYPT. LEFT CAIRO WITH LARGE SUM OF MONEY, PAID BY PERSONS UNKNOWN FOR SERVICES UNDISCLOSED. SAME MYSTERY SURROUNDS HER APPEARANCE AT LEADING SANTO DOMINGO NIGHTCLUB SHORTLY BEFORE TRUJILLO ASSASSINATION, BEING PICKED UP OFF MIAMI IN BULLET-RIDDLED TENDER OF SUNKEN YACHT SHORTLY AFTER COMRADE KHRUSHCHEV'S ILL-FATED CUBAN ADVENTURE, AND DEATH OF SOVIET AGENT IN AUDIENCE DURING HER LAST CONCERT IN BERLIN. ADVISE YOU PLACE HER UNDER SURVEILLANCE OF FEMALE AGENTS AT ALL

TIMES. MALES DO NOT HAVE A CHANCE.

RANDY KIDD IS EX SPECIAL FORCES INSTRUCTOR WHO LEFT U.S. ARMY UNDER CLOUD AFTER BEING FOUND IN BED WITH WIFE OF HIS COMMANDING OFFICER. SERVED SHORT TIME WITH MILITARY INTELLIGENCE OFFICE IN WASHINGTON BEFORE SUDDEN DISCHARGE. RUMOR HAS IT THERE WAS SOME SCANDAL INVOLVING KIDD'S SUPERIOR (FEMALE), WHO FORGOT TO TAKE HER PILL. MANHATTAN OFFICE REPORTS RANDY KIDD SERVED AS POLICE KARATE, JUDO, AND PISTOL INSTRUCTOR BEFORE HE WAS CAUGHT IN BED WITH PRECINCT CAPTAIN'S WIFE AND MISTRESS (AT SAME TIME; HE SAID HE WAS TRYING TO HELP "PATCH THINGS UP" FOR THE CAPTAIN; FIRED ANYWAY). KIDD'S DOSSIER SHOWS HIM WORKING FOR SEVEN PRIVATE-DETECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS IN ROW. AND FIRED FROM SIX OF THEM FOR SEXUAL IRREGULARITIES. (SEVENTH INVOLVED EMPLOYER WHO NEGLECTED TO PAY KIDD AND WOUND UP IN HOSPITAL WITH MULTIPLE ATROCIOUS INJURIES.)

ADVISE YOU ASSIGN ONLY MALE AGENTS TO INVESTIGATE, SHADOW, OR LIQUIDATE KIDD. TO DATE, RANDY KIDD HAS IMPREGNATED TWELVE SOVIET AGENTS (FEMALE), KILLED EIGHTEEN (MALE), COMMITTED GRIEVOUS PERSONAL INDIGNITIES ON MANY OTHERS (OF BOTH SEXES), AND CAUSED THE OUTRAGEOUS DEFECTION OF FORMER AGENT SWISHNIK, AN UNSUPECTED SECURITY RISK, WHO IS NOW SELLING HAND-PAINTED NECKTIES IN NEW YORK'S GREENWICH VILLAGE. METHOD USED BY RANDY KIDD TO BRAINWASH COMRADE SWISHNIK IS MATTER OF VITAL CONCERN

TO COLONEL CHAVOSKY. SEND DETAILS IF POSSIBLE TO ASCERTAIN BEFORE LIQUIDATION.

The hall was dark as Regina got off the elevator to go to her hotel room. The statuesque blond thought about that as she glided along the corridor on silent silver-slippered feet. It was possible the bulb near the elevator had simply blown out. It was also possible the one at the other end of the hall had blown out. But . . . together?

She paused thoughtfully outside her door, fishing quietly in her silver-sequined purse for her key and . . . something else. Then, two things caught her finely tuned attention at once—the door to her room was slightly ajar, and from the dark at the end of the hall came a slight puffing noise.

Whirling with catlike grace, Regina dropped to one side and one knee even as something hummed like an angry hornet past her shell-like ear! The cobra-blue automatic in Regina's left hand spat three ugly little barks of death at the barely visible form down the hall. A man's voice gargled something surprised but incoherent as three .25-caliber dum-dum bullets plowed into his flesh and pushed him, gently but firmly, through the glass window at the end of the corridor. Regina didn't waste time staring at the shattered window. After all, it was seven stories, and she didn't imagine he'd be back soon, even if he took the elevator.

Coming out of her gunfighter's crouch like a slender blue jungle cat, Regina hit the door with a dainty stiff-arm blow as she hurtled into the dark room, gun at the ready, and slid sideways along the wall, adjusting her catlike eyes to the darkness of the room. Something, or someone, was lying on the rug like a bearskin. Since she'd just left Randy in the lobby and hadn't been formally introduced to any other gentlemen in Los Perros, her reaction to the form on her rug was perfectly normal. She shot it.

Regina fired again, taking careful aim at the head this time. Then she flicked on the light.

The room was a perfect mess. Regina's steamer trunk and other luggage had been forced open, their contents scattered helter skelter amid the contents of every drawer, wastebasket, and ashtray in the place. It was all very untidy.

The body lying in the middle of the rug didn't help either. The corpse was that of girl. Very shapely, very naked, and very battered. Her tawny skin was covered with bruises, and a trickle of dried blood ran down her smooth cheek from one corner of her lush young mouth. Her face, in the repose of death, was that of a pretty Oriental of perhaps twenty-five. Regina's last bullet had taken her just over the highly arched right eyebrow, but the Blue Queen could see at a glance that the bloodless wound hadn't been the cause of her death, any more than the bullet hole just under one shapely breast had. The Oriental girl had been dead when Regina entered.

There were two shots left in the Blue Queen's snub-nosed automatic. Hardly enough for entertaining unexpected guests who might drop by for a midnight murder. Regina moved on the balls of her feet as far as the bedroom door, glanced inside at the rumpled bed, and, seeing that the room appeared empty, proceeded to reload her gun. She took the clip out, frowning at the disheveled condition of a bed she was sure she'd left in immaculate condition before going over to the casino that night to do her act. Then she noticed a small blue object lying near a crumpled black mesh stocking she had neither worn nor seen before in her life.

The object, about the size of a cigar, was made of sheet metal, with a small disc or drum on one side. Still holding the nearly empty clip in one hand and the gun in the other, Regina moved over by the bed and bent down to pick the object up. Placing the automatic on the rumpled sheets near the headboard, Regina held the strange glittering object up to the light and smiled quizzically. It was a child's toy

kazoo. One of those cheap sheet-metal-and-tissue-paper instruments sold in dime stores and at school candy counters for the musically inclined denizens of the blackboard jungle. The dead girl in the other room might or might not have been able to play a piano, but somehow she hadn't appeared to be a devotee of the kazoo! Yet if she hadn't brought it with her, who had?

As if in answer to her unspoken question, a large naked hand reached out from under the bed, grabbed the Blue Queen in a most indelicate place, and hung on for dear life as a husky male voice gasped, "Darling! I love you!"

"Gleep!" shouted the Blue Queen, launching herself into space with a powerful thrust of shapely thighs. She came down five or six feet away, pointing the weapon in her hand at the head and naked shoulders of the man slithering out from under the bed.

Unfortunately, the weapon Regina was pointing at the moment happened to be the blue kazoo. Ruefully, Regina looked at her automatic, which was on the bed, and muttered, "Why must I be so goosy?"

"I love you *madly*, you georgeous wench!" the man under the bed answered. Only he wasn't under the bed any more. He was on his hands and knees between Regina and her gun. And he was getting to his feet! He didn't have a stitch of clothing on, and this seemed to embarrass Regina more than it did him.

"Allow me," he said with a courtly bow, "to introduce myself. I am agent Teratitov, of the MVD. But enough of this lovemaking, take off your clothes!"

"What kind of girl do you think I am?" Regina asked, automatically smiling as she backed away and gauged the distance to the bed. The man was obviously drunk, drugged, or insane. But the room was small, and an end run around his outstretched hairy arms would be chancy. She tried it anyway.

As if he'd been expecting it, the nude man caught the top of Regina's blue satin gown and pulled. There was a ripping sound as the front of her dress gave way, and then Regina, who in deference to the heat and humidity

of the night was wearing nothing under it, flew backward at a tangent, bounced off the wall, overturning an end table, and fell, nude, across the crumpled sheets of the bed.

The Soviet agent licked his lips as, looking down at her lush white nakedness, he asked, "Haven't I seen you someplace before, darling?"

"You were wearing a policeman's uniform at the time," Regina purred sleepily. Lifting the automatic until it was staring at his navel, she added, "And while we're taking in the scene, lover, take a look at this!"

The Russian shrugged fatalistically and sighed. "Guns? What are guns at a time like this, my little cabbage? Can't you see this is bigger than both of us?"

Regina glanced down, flushed slightly as she concentrated on an area slightly above his navel, and said, "Never mind how big it is, honey. Just remember that I'm pointing a gun at you and that if you take *one more step*, I'm going to pull the trigger!"

Teratitov took another step.

The Blue Queen pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

Remembering too late that she'd taken the clip out, Regina managed to roll over on her tummy before the Soviet agent fell on her, gasping husky Slavic words of endearment and biting her on the neck as his hot hands explored her flesh.

"*Easy*, lover!" Regina gasped, her voice taking on a sultry edge as she fought for time.

"I love you madly!" Teratitov husked. "Why do you resist, my pigeon? It is like I told that Chinese girl in the next room, 'When rape is inevitable, why not relax and enjoy it?' "

"You . . . you made love to *her, too?*" Regina gasped, deftly moving to a more strategic position of defense as his hand grasped empty air where it had expected to encounter something else. Intrigued in spite of herself, Regina added, "Don't you know that that much lovemaking in this jungle heat could prove fatal?"

"So, if you die, you die." The Russian shrugged. "Stop resisting me, my cabbage. I will have to hit you if you keep fighting off my passion. I do not *want* to hit you. I did not even want to hit that other one. I am a gentleman, even to Chinese agents. But enough is enough, and a man in *my* condition cannot be frustrated indefinitely."

The Russian's nails were biting into Regina's flesh, and the Blue Queen could hardly breathe with his weight pressing her deeper and deeper into the rumpled sheets. She bit her lips, trying not to scream, as the realization that she dealt with a mad sex fiend forced her to cling to her cool. And then, just as she'd given up hope, there was a dull thud and the man attacking her collapsed in limp unconsciousness across her naked body. Randy Kidd, his voice calmly cynical, muttered, "I hope I didn't spoil anything nice, Regina, but the place will be crawling with fuzz in a minute."

Regina didn't answer until Randy took the Soviet agent by the scalp and casually tossed him into a corner. Then, sitting up and hastily covering herself with one corner of the sheet, she cracked, "That's what I like about you, Randy. You're so possessive. Did you say the police were on their way up?"

"Yeah, somebody shot a guy through a window down at the end of the corridor. I've got the door out front locked and a chair braced against the knob, but since the shooting took place on this floor, I imagine they'll be coming down the hall with a few questions."

He gazed morosely at the crumpled form of the Soviet agent and added, "We'd better have a few answers, huh?"

"Hand me my robe, dear," Regina sighed. "I'll tell you what I know as I dress. Not that I know very much, I'm afraid. You saw the young lady out in the other room?"

"Of course. You shoot her after you sent that other Chinese out the window?"

"He was a Chinese?" Regina frowned. Pointing a silver-slippered toe at the object on the floor she added, "I suppose that means he was with the girl, but I don't know

what the Russian had to do with them or which of the three brought along a kazoo."

Randy looked at the tinny musical instrument, frowned, and picked it up. "Never heard of anyone accompanying a murder on one of these things." He smiled. Then, placing it to his lips and making a few muffled sounds, he added, "It's busted."

"Probably got stepped on." Regina nodded. "But hide it, Randy. The police will be here any moment, and somehow I think it may be important to this case."

"What case?" Randy asked, slipping the blue kazoo into the pocket of his jacket.

There was an imperative pounding on the door, and Regina, getting to her feet, tied the sash across the front of her blue robe and sighed, "The one we're mixed up in, darling. Somebody sent a spy, or spies, with a blue kazoo to kill—or at any rate, to do something to—the Blue Queen. It may be just a concidence, but I do have this superstition about blue being my color, and—"

"Maybe this love-mad friend of yours will tell us about the blue kazoo," Randy said, glancing down at the man he'd knocked out as he walked over to let the police in. Then Randy Kidd stopped in midstride to frown down at the Russian.

"*He's smiling!*" Randy muttered.

"Maybe he's having a w—- happy dream?" Regina asked.

Randy Kidd dropped to one knee and placed two fingers against the man's throat. Then he whistled softly and answered, "He's not dreaming, Regina. Funny . . . I didn't think I hit him *that* hard, but I must have blown my cool when I saw what he was trying to do."

"You don't blow your cool, Randy," Regina answered soberly.

"I did this time. The guy's like dead!"

Chapter THREE

Considering that between them, Regina and her accompanist had apparently shot two Chinese secret agents and beaten a Russian one to death in the space of five or ten minutes, there was surprisingly little fuss about it. They had to go down to police headquarters and sign a few statements, of course. But this time, there was no argument. The local authorities accepted their admittedly fishy stories as if triple murders were a nightly occurrence in Los Perros. A bored-looking police sergeant with an indifferent command of the English language said, "While you are at it, señorita, would you be good enough to sign this?"

Regina looked down at the blank paper he held in his hand and asked what it was.

"Autograph, señorita Regina." The policeman smiled. "My son, Pablocito, is one great fan of yourself. He asked me to get your autograph, *por favor*. He has—how you call it?—collection of signatures, eh?"

"How old is Pablocito?" Regina asked, taking the blank, curiously thick piece of paper and signing her name with a silver-plated automatic pencil.

The policeman looked blank, and then he caught himself and said, "Nine years old, señorita."

"He must enjoy the floor show at the casino," Regina mused sardonically.

Before she could hand the paper back, Randy said, "May as well put *my* John Hancock on it too." And he took the paper from her. The policeman started to say something. Then, seeing that the pianist had already inscribed his own name below that of his employer, the sergeant lapsed into sullen silence. Having signed his own name with a flourish, Randy handed the double autograph back to the policeman. The latter took it, did a double

take, and stared in bewilderment at Randy as the hard-eyed American asked, "Something eating you, friend?"

"No. Nothing is—how you say?—eating anyone, señor Keed," the policeman answered sullenly. He dropped the autographed paper into an open desk drawer, as if he didn't really care whether Pablocito ever saw it or not, and muttered, "That will be all, señorita Regina and señor Keed. We will call you at the casino or at your hotel, if there are any further questions."

"I must say you've been a perfect dove about this whole sticky thing, officer honey," Regina purred, taking Randy by the arm as she rose from her chair.

The police official shrugged and answered, "These things happen during the rainy season."

Regina waited until they were outside and headed for a nearby taxi stand before she whispered, "That was almost *too* easy."

"You know it," Randy muttered. "Don't go that way, Regina."

"We have to take a cab, honey." Regina frowned, noting the dark street Randy was leading her down. "It must be over a mile from here to our hotel.

"Mile and a half. I checked," Randy said a trifle grimly. "That's why I parked a car down this side street a ways. I sort of figured we might be paying the fuzz a visit sooner or later."

"How thoughtful!" Regina smiled. "And we leave the local mass transportation to the local masses?"

" 'The masses, what asses'—Karl Marx," Randy agreed, as he and Regina vanished together into the mouth of an alley. He led her to a battered-looking black sedan parked in the lee of a pepper-curing shed and explained how he'd rented it from a used-car dealer who normally didn't rent cars. "Figured they might be watching car-rental agencies as well as cab companies."

"That sounds logical." Regina nodded. "Who are *they?*"

"Beats me." Randy shrugged. "Same cats who tried to

kill you this evening, I guess. Or maybe the cats who pulled the strings back there in the police station. We spent less time explaining a triple killing than we should have spent talking our way out of a ticket for double parking. Somebody up there likes us, or wants us out on the street, where he can get a clear shot at us!"

As if in confirmation of Randy's words, there came a horrendous whump of sound from a space in front of the police station that had, up until a few moments ago, been occupied by a taxicab. Even down the block and around the corner of the alleyway, the noise of the explosion was deafening. Windows shattered for blocks, tiles were ripped from nearby roofs, and bits and pieces of taxicab and the man who'd been lounging in the driver's seat came down over a large area of downtown Los Perros.

Randy Kidd waited until most of the debris had stopped plonking down around them before he turned to Regina and said, "Forget what I said about somebody *liking* us!"

"Time bombs, anyone?" Regina asked.

"Must have been." Randy shrugged. "If I hadn't had this car held in reserve down here, we'd have been sitting in that taxi and about four or five blocks from here by now. Somebody must have planted it while we were in the stationhouse. Notice how anxious they seemed to have us leave?"

Regina pouted. "I'm deeply hurt. I did so want Pablocito to like me for myself alone."

Randy threw the car into gear and U-turned to leave via the other end of the alley. "Pablocito's autograph bit was probably a device to keep us occupied while his *papacito's* pals wired our cab for fun and games. But we'd better have a good look at that paper when we've put a few blocks between ourselves and the boom-boom boys."

"I thought I saw you palm the paper he gave me," Regina laughed. "Where did you find another one so much like it in such a hurry?"

"Memo pad on a desk across the room." Randy smiled. "Noticed it was the same kind of note paper the police

sergeant handed you. That was right after I also noticed he'd prepared it beforehand for your signature."

"He was clumsy, wasn't he?" Regina nodded, adding, "He could have had it in place on top of the pad on his desk. And he might have given a bit more thought to Pablocito's sudden interest in the autograph of an entertainer his father couldn't have possibly known he was going to be entertaining at police headquarters tonight."

"Unless he knew she was expecting company," Randy agreed.

"Even so . . . nine years old?" Regina laughed. "I should think they'd teach these boys a few of the basic moves before sending them out to play. Speaking of they, Randy, let's have a peek at that paper you stole from the darling policeman."

Without taking his eyes from the narrow road they'd come out on, Randy Kidd reached into his side pocket and handed Regina the folded slip of note paper.

She took it wordlessly, sniffed, and said, "Rubber cement."

"Really? Thought the paper seemed awfully thick. They glued a couple of pieces together eh?"

"Not glued, dear. Rubber cemented. If you use it right, you can separate papers stuck together that way without damaging them and– Hello, there seems to be all sorts of goodies wrapped up in little Pablocito's surprise package."

As Randy drove, Regina worried the thin sheets of paper apart with her fingernails. "There's a carbon paper sandwiched in between the top and bottom sheets. Seems to be a message typed on the hidden sheet and . . . How *thoughtful* of dear little Pablocito!"

"Love letter?"

"Suicide note. Listen. 'To whom it may concern: Life is meaningless for me since the death of my beloved Speedy Gonzales. Forgive me, everyone, for taking the only way out of a world that has become, for me, a pile of meaningless ashes.' Guess whose signature is attached to this drivel."

"Yours, of course," Randy snorted. "When you signed

the so-called autograph on the black sheet, the carbon transferred it to the suicide note."

"Nobody but a Russian could have written the silly thing," Regina mused. "There's a decidedly Slavic ring to it, don't you think? That lets Moscow off the hook as far as the bomb in the rumble seat, I imagine."

"How do you figure?"

"Not much sense to go to all the trouble of having me sign a suicide note if they were planning to murder me, is there?"

"Okay. That means whoever tried to blow us to bits had no connection with Speedy Gonzales, if what you say about his confessing he was a Soviet agent means anything." Randy lapsed into silence for a moment and then added brightly, "Hey, that means there are at least *two* people, or bunches of people, trying to knock us off!"

"Don't be so optimistic, darling," Regina answered dryly. "How do you know there are only *two* sides to this mess?"

Chapter FOUR

"Okay, Kidd. Where's the blue kazoo?"

The man who was speaking was large and ugly, and he looked like he meant business. He was also pointing a very large revolver at the American musician as the latter, eyes still unaccustomed to the darkness of his unfortunately occupied bathroom, stood blinking in the doorway. Since Randy had opened the door with every intention of taking a hot shower, he was wearing nothing but a towel. The comfortably authoritative Walther P-38 he normally took with him on blind dates was hanging, at the moment, over a chair in its spring holster, a good fifteen feet in back of him. A closer look at the grim-faced character standing in his shower stall with a gun discouraged any thoughts of a mad dash for it for the time being.

"I'm still waiting, Kidd," the man with the gun said. "I'm also getting kind of impatient. Like, one more time, where's the blue kazoo?"

"Do I look like I'm carrying musical instruments around with me?" Kidd answered in a disgusted voice.

The man with the gun grinned evilly and said, "No. And no guns, neither. I figured if I waited here in the john you'd be coming in sooner or later."

"And you figured I'd bring my kazoo along too? I mean, I might sing in the shower, but . . . a *kazoo?*"

"Quit stalling." The man with the gun sneered. "Where's the goddamn blue kazoo?"

"You win," Randy said with a shrug, turning to lead the way into the bedroom. The man with the gun didn't bother to hide the smile of petty triumph as he stepped from the shower stall. Had he looked where he was stepping, he probably would have avoided the wet cake of soap on the tile floor. It is doubtful, however, that it would have done him that much good, for Randy, drop-

ping all pretense of manly modesty, flicked the towel from around his waist in a vicious, eyeball-shattering snap across the gunman's face.

As the soap-and-towel-assaulted hood pirouetted wildly, Randy gave him a healthy kick in the *derriere* and sent him crashing head-first into the commode. At the same time, the now naked musician darted out of the dark bathroom and slammed the door. He managed to lock it from the outside and move out of the line of fire as five bullets punched their way through the hardwood paneling in rapid succession. Assuming the Webley had been fully loaded, that meant his opponent had one bullet left.

"About the blue kazoo . . ." Randy said casually, as he hefted the Walther P-38 he'd taken from the spring holster draped over the back of the chair near his bed.

There was a loud report, and another bullet spanged through the hardwood door. Randy smiled crookedly and walked over to the door. Holding the pistol in one hand, Randy unlocked and opened the bathroom door with the other.

The gunman was out of ammunition but still full of sass. The moment the door was open he came charging out like an enraged bull, flailing empty air with hamlike fists and making unprintable remarks about people who left wet soap on bathroom floors. Randy sighed and, before his opponent's eyes adjusted to the light, whipped him across the side of the skull with the barrel of his own gun. The man staggered, blinked a couple of times, and went to sleep on the rug.

He was still lying there, snoring peacefully, when Regina came in from her adjoining suite. By this time Randy had slipped into a clean shirt, a dinner jacket, and black silk slacks. So Regina concentrated on the recumbent figure on the floor.

"Loused up my shower," Randy explained. "Had to settle for a quick rubdown with a wet towel. You ever try to scrub your own back with one hand while covering a guy with a gun in the other?" He grinned roguishly

and added, "For that matter, have you ever tried to scrub your own back?"

"Let's not get personal, darling," Regina purred. "What else have you discovered about your playmate, aside from the fact that he's clumsy?"

"His name is Hennesy, and he has a mail-order badge attached to his wallet," Randy answered. "And his passport lists his occupation as private investigator. Pan Terrestrial Detective Agency, New York and San Francisco. I know the outfit. Operates out of a Fourteenth Street mail drop near Union Square. Strictly a shoestring organization."

"Divorces, skip tracing, watching the silver at Bar Mitzvas," Regina agreed. "One of those seedy little operations that seldom have the cab fare to Jersey. So . . . what was he doing in your shower stall in this far-off and exotic land, if you'll pardon the plug?"

"Good question." Randy nodded. "Let's ask him."

He went into the bathroom, filled a pitcher with tap water, and came back outside. He sat on the gunman's chest, placed the barrel of his P-38 against the bullet-shaped cranium of the man whose passport proclaimed him a private eye, and started pouring.

"What . . . what hit me?" The man claiming to be Hennesy sputtered.

"Not what, who," Randy answered amiably. He slapped the gunsel a couple of times to gain his undivided attention and said, "Let's not worry about what or who hit you in the *past*, friend. Right now it's your future you should be thinking about. Who are you and who sent you? And make it fast, friend. We're due at the casino in a few minutes."

"Tactical error, Randy darling," Regina sighed. "Now that you've told this little old gunman honey we're in a hurry, he's just sure to try and stall!" She smiled pleasantly down at the man pinned to the rug by her accompanist and added sweetly, "I'm afraid we'll have to torture him."

"Listen," The man on the floor whimpered. "You can look at my passport and wallet and find out all you want to know. Like, the agency sent me down here to get the blue kazoo. That's all I know about it, so help me Hannah."

"You'll need help from Hannah and a couple of other people if you don't sing a better story, friend," Randy growled, taking a deliberately indifferent swipe at the man's Neanderthal skull with the barrel of his gun.

"Don't forget to replace the divots," Regina observed. "Don't you think we'd get faster results if you let me use the old glass-thermometer bit on him?"

"*Please*, honey." Randy grimaced, shooting a look of what seemed almost sympathy at his victim. "You *know* it makes me sick to watch, and besides, we haven't got a ball-peen hammer."

"We could use the heel of my shoe," Regina said. Then she brightened girlishly and added, "I had the dressmaker in this evening, and there's an absobloodylutely *loverly* pair of pinking shears in my room. We can heat them red-hot over the table lighter, and . . . Ooooh! I can't *wait!*"

She gave a squeal of glee that might well have come from Lucrezia Borgia during one of her lighter moments and whirled to leave the room—not forgetting to add as she darted out the door, "Don't let him get away, Randy honey. You *know* how it turns me on to have a man absolutely at my mercy."

"Yeah," Randy sighed, muttering something the terrified gunman hoped earnestly he wasn't hearing correctly. For what seemed a good five years the two of them stared at one another, the gunman licking his suddenly very dry lips and Randy staring morosely down at him and shaking his head from time to time in the sort of sympathetic gesture one expects from an executioner with a certain amount of empathy.

"What's this bit with red-hot pinking shears?" the man calling himself Hennesy whispered.

Randy shrugged and answered, "The usual. It's messy,

but the hot steel cauterizes most of the severed blood vessels, and you'll save a lot of money once you're saved the trouble of chasing dames. Don't worry, friend. The red-hot pinking shears are kid stuff compared to—" Randy suddenly retched and muttered, "Let's not talk about it, huh? Like, you'll find out about the thermometer and ball-peen hammer soon enough."

"What . . . what do you do to a guy with a *thermometer*, for Pete's sake?"

"Lots of things. But let me ask you a question. What do you do with a blue kazoo?"

"Honest, I don't *know!* The doc sent me to get it, and—" The gunman suddenly bit his tongue and lapsed into sullen silence.

"Doctor Fang sent you after the blue kazoo." Randy nodded. It was a statement, not a question.

"Maybe he did and maybe he didn't," the man pinned to the floor answered. "I ain't ready to talk about no Doctor Fang yet."

"You will be, by the time Regina heats those shears a bit." Randy Kidd shrugged. "Besides, we already know just about all we have to about you, friend."

"Sure, you went through my pockets after you sapped me," the gunsel replied. "You've got my passport and buzzer and—"

"Don't get cute," Randy snapped, raking another divot out of the man's forehead with the gunsight of his P-38. "You were never sent all the way down here by a shoestring skip-tracing outfit like Pan Terrestrial."

"You seen the badge."

"And the passport. Did you guys have to kill Hennesy to get them or did somebody pick his pockets while he was vacationing?"

"I can't find the pinking shears," Regina said from the doorway, "But look what I did manage to borrow from a dear little old hotel maintenance man down the hall!"

The man pinned to the floor gazed in horror over Randy Kidd's shoulder at the bizarre appearance Blue Queen made as she stood there, stripped down to panties

and bra but wearing her aquamarine tiara and a pair of silver calf-length boots. In one hand she held a large, rusty monkey wrench. In the other, glittering evilly in the light, was a slender sliver of glass—a small and somehow deadly-looking clinical thermometer.

"I'll talk!" the gunman gasped weakly. He stared up at Randy Kidd's impassive face and added, "Keep her the hell away from me, will ya? I'll tell you everything I know, *honest!*"

"What do you say, Regina?" Randy asked dubiously.

"He's had his chance to talk." Regina pouted. "Now it's *my* turn to have a little fun!"

"You gotta *listen!*" The man on the floor pleaded. "Keep her off of me, mister. I'll tell you the whole story!"

"On your feet," Randy said, getting up lightly and still covering the man with his drawn pistol. He pointed to a chair across the room and added, "Sit over there and keep your hands where I can see them."

"Make him take his pants off first," Regina insisted.

"Later," Randy growled.

"She's *nuts!*" The gunman whimpered, staring in fascinated horror at the sliver of glass in the Blue Queen's hand as he backed weakly across the room to sink down into an overstuffed chair.

Regina glared wildly at him, hefted the monkey wrench thoughtfully, and hissed, "Don't *say* that. Don't *ever* say I'm not . . . sane."

"Jesus!" the gunman whimpered. It was not, at the moment, intended as profanity.

Randy Kidd shot Regina a look one reserves for retarded children, sex maniacs, and other dingalings, as he asked mildly, "About that passport . . ."

"It's mine. I really am Mike Hennesy, and I really was with Pan Terrestrial. Up to a couple of months ago, that is."

"Why'd they fire you? Taking bribes from the wife you were supposed to be tailing, or just drunk on the job?"

"It was the husband. He offered me a new car to say

he and a certain blond really *was* working late at the office. The agency found out about it and blackballed me. I took this job as security man on a cruise ship and wound up on the beach here in Los Perros."

"Couldn't keep your hands off the passengers' goodies, eh?"

"It was a bum rap," Hennesy insisted. "Anyhow, I was stuck down here, without no job or nothin', until the doc hired me to run a few errands for him."

"Doctor Fang?"

"That his name? Funny thing about the doc was that he never gave me no name. I mean, he just said I was supposed to call him Doctor and let it go at that, see?"

"What about the blue kazoo?"

"What about it? I mean, the doc sent me over tonight to get it from you, Mr. Kidd. He didn't say nothin' about *why* he wanted it. Just told me not to come back without it if I wanted to go on living. Like, he's a great kidder, the doc is."

Randy took the blue kazoo from his pocket with his free hand and held it up to the light. It didn't seem to be any more than what it appeared. A cheap tin toy. He looked again at Regina, who was still glaring a little glassy-eyed at the cowering man in the chair, and muttered, "I'm afraid you'll have to tell me a little more than that about this thing, friend."

"That's all I know, so help me!" the man whimpered, sweat breaking out in little beads all over his forehead as Regina grinned evilly and licked her lips with the point of her pink tongue. He stared in fascination as she twirled the thermometer between dainty fingers, and then his face brightened and he said, "One thing I do remember—the doc said not to blow on it."

"Not to blow on it?" Randy mused, placing the thing once more to his lips. He hummed a light tune into it, the way you're supposed to hum into a kazoo, only nothing happened. He frowned and, taking a deeper breath, blew.

The blue kazoo went, *pffft!*

The man sitting in the chair went, "Ouch!"

"Sorry about that," said Randy Kidd, gazing in sudden interest at what appeared to be a small gray ball of fuzz sprouting from the center of Hennesy's forehead. The reason the blue kazoo wouldn't make like a kazoo was now rather obvious. It wasn't a blue kazoo. It was a blue blow-gun.

"Rather ingenious," Randy said, examining the little drum that, on a normal kazoo, holds the tissue paper that makes the reverberation when you hum into it. "This gizmo sitting on top of the thing works just like a drum magazine of a World War One Lewis gun. The thing's a repeating dart gun. Fires a dart every time you blow good and hard into the mouthpiece."

He looked thoughtfully at the tufted tail of the dart sticking into Hennesy's Neanderthal cranium and added thoughtfully, "I wonder if they're poison darts."

Regina picked up the phone. "Room service, please." She waited until the desk connected her with room service, and then she calmly asked for some ice.

"About a hundred pounds of it, sweety." She dimpled. "And please chop it up for me, will you?" She glanced up as Hennesy toppled forward onto the rug and added, "And try to *hurry*, will you?"

Hanging up, the Blue Queen turned to Randy and said, "You'll have to stash him behind the bed or something until the ice gets here, Randy darling. Meanwhile, I suppose I'd better change to something less spooky."

"I suppose you'd better," Randy agreed. "They're going to think it's spooky enough, delivering a hundred pounds of chopped ice on short notice. What, by the way, are we going to *do* with a hundred pounds of chopped ice, give a party?"

"More like an autopsy, dear," Regina purred. "But first we're due at the club. Our act goes on in less than an hour, remember?"

"You mean . . . you ordered the ice for . . . him?"

"He'll need it, in this heat." Regina shrugged. "Our act will take us three hours or more, what with mixing with the crowd and fighting señor Verdugo off during

his nightly after-the-show wrestling match. If we're back by two or three in the morning we'll be lucky."

"But . . . *where*, for crying out loud?"

"Where but the bathtub, silly? Have them put the chopped ice in the tub, and then, after they go, let's have Hennesy on the rocks."

Chapter FIVE

The blue spotlight played on the shimmering gown of the woman known to the public only as Regina, while, at the piano, Randy Kidd, cool and detached in immaculate ruffled shirt and white dinner jacket especially tailored to drape neatly despite the shoulder holster under his left armpit, tooled through the opening bars of "Laziest Gal in Town."

It was the usual Tuesday-night crowd. Wise-money boys who knew you didn't have to tip the maître d' as heavily during an off night as on the weekend; bored-looking airline hostesses; stranded swingers left over from that Jet Set yachting party that bombed out over the weekend; a couple of cruising businesswomen, casing the crowd in vain for an unattached American from the cruise ship down in the harbor; and, as always in Los Perros, a sprinkling of khaki-clad military officers in search of wine, women, and a quick buck. The quick buck in this case being the high-rolling action at the crap and roulette tables in the big room off the cocktail lounge where Regina entertained nightly. The casino was noted, among the military, for a surprisingly pleasant peculiarity. No officer above the rank of captain had ever, in living memory, lost at the tables of Casino Cabrones.

Cynics attributed this as much to the laws of survival as those of luck, but as General Carillo, of the Republican Guard, was fond of saying, "Who cares about those who speak of sour grapes?" General Carillo was rumored to be very lucky at boule or anything else he chose to play. But the good general was not there that Tuesday night, and anyhow, Randy was not worried about him or any other guardsman who might be visiting the Casino Cabrones for pleasure. He was much more concerned with those members of the local fuzz he might be called upon to deal with if anyone at the hotel chose to ignore

the DON'T DISTURB! sign he'd hung on the door of his room.

"Hot night, isn't it?" a familiar voice said in Randy's ear. The pianist turned to nod at one of the CIA men who'd been there the night the French girl went out his window. He wondered guiltily just what the significance of the secret agent's remark might be. You say a hundred pounds of ice and it sounds like an awfull lot. But it *was* a hot night, and Hennesy had been an awfully big corpse. How many hours had it been since they'd left him, doubled up in the ice-filled bathtub with the air conditioner turned up as high as the not too efficient local equipment would go?

"Must be bad for business," the agent persisted, ignoring the sultry lyrics Regina was purring into her hand mike, as well as the obvious fact that Randy was in no mood for idle chitchat. That was the trouble with people in his line of work, Randy thought with a grimace, people in the business of gathering intelligence developed a nasty habit of asking questions. All kinds of questions, and at the strangest times and places.

"Yes, sir," his persecuter droned on, ignoring a dirty look Regina shot him over her hand mike. "The heat and sticky night air seem to have driven just about everybody down to the beach or into a glass of gin and tonic. Hardly anybody here tonight."

Randy shrugged, not missing a beat of the rather tricky melody as Regina purred,

It's not 'cause I shouldn't
  It's not 'cause I wouldn't
    And the good lord knows, it's not 'cause I *couldn't!*
It's simply because
  I'm the *laziest* gal in town. . . .

It was a dull night, he'd noticed. Even for a Tuesday. But to Randy, as to everyone in the entertainment world, it was the sophisticated crowd that came around on off nights, when the ribbon clerks and other nine to fivers

were safely home in their trundle beds, that turned you on with their approval. Anyone can get applause from the Saturday Night Savages. A Hoke comic with a lampshade on his head or a torch with dowager's hump and the inability to carry a tune in a bucket can bring down the house on a weekend. But the jaded, well-to-do swingers who drop by during the off nights are another matter. Regina, as always, was pleasing this late-night gathering of the Casino Cabrones clan. And Randy, as usual, was casing the crowd for a conquest.

There were several stunning women within range of his roving eye, but Randy hadn't settled on any one in particular. The night was young, and there was a matter of a corpse folded up in his bathroom to think about. What the devil had Regina meant about an autopsy? He knew the Blue Queen had once studied medicine—and just about everything else her deceptively beautiful skull could absorb. But was Regina actually planning to spread the guy out and . . . ?

"Are you trying to be funny, Kidd?" the CIA man suddenly asked in an annoyed tone.

Randy, not taking his eyes off the scintillating figure of Regina, asked, "Pardon?"

"I'm *trying* to be a nice guy," the CIA man continued. "I mean, it isn't *my* fault you two refuse to cooperate with your own government, you know."

"And you were assigned to keep an eye on us?"

"That's neither here nor there, Kidd. The point is that I'm trying to keep the party polite, but if you pull any more wise stuff with . . . what the hell *did* you jab me with, a nail file?"

Randy turned, not missing a beat on the piano, and frowned thoughtfully at his questioner.

The CIA man was a thickset type in pale beige pongees and horn-rimmed glasses. He was glaring in injured dignity at the musician, rubbing the place where he sat, as he added, "You must go over big at conventions, Kidd. Bet you drop paper bags full of water on people from your hotel room."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Randy sighed.

"Come on, you jerk. There's nobody within ten feet of my stern but *you!*"

"And somebody just jabbed you in the— Somebody stuck you with something?"

"Oh, hell no! I just rub my fanny *every* night about this time!"

"Turn around!" Randy snapped urgently. "You may have been shot!"

"Shot?" The man frowned in bewilderment, "I didn't hear any gun."

"You weren't shot with a gun," Randy said seriously, "but you may have been shot with a blue kazoo!"

The CIA man opened his mouth, let it hang that way for a full ten seconds, and then, with a very suspicious expression, asked, "A blue kazoo?"

"That's what I said." Randy nodded.

"That what I *thought* you said," The CIA man growled. "You really are a very funny guy, Kidd. Who writes your material?"

"I'm serious!" Randy insisted, noticing that Regina, whose blue eyes missed very little in this world despite their wide, baby-doll-innocent expression, had noticed the byplay by the piano and was skipping a full chorus of her song. Randy segued smoothly through the missing bars and urgently told the CIA man, "You'd better get yourself to a doctor, friend. If Doctor Fang's lads have done what I think they have to you, you're in big trouble!"

"Doctor Fang." The CIA man nodded in sudden interest. "You want to talk about Doctor Fang after all, eh?"

"I don't want to talk about anything but getting you to a doctor!" Randy insisted, finishing his last riff and spinning around on the piano stool in one smooth motion. He got to his feet and took the CIA man's arm in a firm, friendly grip as he whispered, "We haven't time to talk

about it, but if you've been shot with one of Fang's blue kazoos . . ."

"You're *nuts!*" the injured man gasped, sudden fear replacing the suspicious humor in his eyes as he saw how deadly serious the tall American was. He twisted free of Randy's grasp and backed away with one hand inside his jacket. Randy did not think the other was reaching for a cigar, and so he stood very still as the CIA man muttered, "They told me you were a kook, but they didn't tell me what a dingaling you really were!" He spotted Regina, gliding across the lounge toward them with a radiant smile pasted across her beautiful face, and added, "Jab a guy in the can with a nail file and tell him he's been shot with a kazoo! It might be funny to *you*, Kidd, but I don't get the point!"

"You might have got the point and not know it," Randy sighed. But his pongee-clad playmate didn't hear. With a final parting shot about "Blue *kazoos*, for Chris-sake!" The CIA man faded away between the potted palms of Casino Cabrones and out through a pair of French doors leading to a terrace overlooking the sea.

Regina joined Randy and asked, not losing her smile as she nodded to a pair of military men who'd just entered the lounge, what the trouble was.

"One of those CIA men we talked to the other day was just here," Randy explained, bowing at a young redhead waving rather desperately at him from across the room. "Somebody, or something, just jabbed him in the *derriere*. I tried to tell him about the blue kazoo, but he thought I was ribbing him."

"I saw him, if he was the fellow in the pongee jacket," Regina replied. "But he looked all right when he ducked out those French doors. Couldn't it have been an insect?"

"Could have been me with a nail file." Randy shrugged. "But if he was hit with one of those darts like the one that nailed Hennesy—"

"He'd be lying about ten feet from the piano," Regina cut in.

Randy blinked, smiled, and said, "Hey, *yeah!* I forgot

how *fast* Hennesy died after he was hit. Maybe it was just a bug. Lord knows they have enough of them in this neck of the woods."

"Company," Regina purred warningly. Randy looked in the direction she was pointing with her silver cigarette holder.

The girl who'd been waving at Randy from across the room was coming toward them, still waving, although not with her hands.

"She's going to dislocate a hip," Regina mused. There was a slightly amused look in her eye as she added, "What's with it between you and redheads, anyway, darling?"

"The French chick doesn't count," Randy said quickly. "She was a rinse job."

"I noticed," Regina said dryly. "I've got to see if señor Verdugo can be persuaded to let us off early tonight. We've got a date with Hennesy, remember?"

"Glug." Randy nodded.

By this time the redhead with the double-jointed walk had come within earshot. She had the green eyes and milk-white skin that go with the best shade of auburn hair, and her slender body, writhing sensuously inside its expensive sheath of emerald-green brocade and overpowering perfume, had the long, aristocratic bone structure one associates with the horse-and-tennis type of landed Irish gentry. She was a beautiful, expensive animal. She knew it. She dismissed Regina with a bored flicker of disinterest before fixing her blazing green eyes on Randy and saying huskily, "My name is Baby Jane Dough, and I'm hot for your body."

"That's, ah, swell," Randy managed, touching a hand lightly to his bow tie to make sure it wasn't really spinning like a propeller.

"I'll leave you kiddies to your own fun and games," Regina purred, eyeing Baby Jane Dough with the tolerant amusement an expert mouser feels toward a precocious kitten. She shot Randy an arch look as she added, "I'll be ready to leave in less than an hour, darling. I wouldn't

want to keep Mr. Hennesy *waiting*." To the redhead she added sweetly, "Try not to hit the fence this time, dearie."

"What was that all about?" Baby Jane Dough frowned, dropping her cool for a moment to glare at the receding view of the Blue Queen.

"We did have this, ah, previous engagement, doll," Randy explained. He quickly added, "But it won't take long. We could, ah, sort of meet someplace afterward."

"Couldn't you take me along?" Baby Jane pouted, adding, "I'm absolutely stoked on getting you out of this absolutely revolting vertical position!"

"That makes two of us." Randy smiled. "But this, ah, party is sort of *business*."

"Monkey business?"

Randy pictured Hennesy, who *was* rather simian when you thought about it, lying in the rapidly melting ice, and he grimaced. Then he smiled blandly and went into a completely untrue tale of having to meet a theatrical booking agent about a future club date. By the time he'd finished, he and Baby Jane Dough were seated at a small table in one of the intimate booths lining the walls of the dimly lit cocktail lounge. Lapsing into a momentary bit of truthful irony, Randy said, "I can't stand to tear myself away, but honestly, if Regina and I don't, ah, interview this fellow who's waiting for us, there's no telling where we'll be a few days from now."

"I'm thirsty," Baby Jane Dough cut in, adding in a spoiled-brat tone, "Next to love, I'm stoked on champagne."

"That's easy to arrange." Randy smiled, catching the eye of a sleepy-looking waiter. He ordered Mum's Cordon Rouge '59, not flinching as Baby Jane, who'd kicked off her shoes, ran a bare foot up inside the cuff of his black silk trousers. It was pretty late, and a hundred pounds of ice wasn't as much ice as you might imagine, and . . .

"I think I'm going to throw up," Baby Jane Dough said.

"Pardon?"

"I said I think I'm going to throw up. I'm feeling funny all of a sudden."

"What have you been drinking?" asked Randy, a bit disappointed in how easy it was going to be to ditch this pouty little nymphomaniac, after all.

Baby Jane Dough looked vacantly at an empty spot in the middle of the table, blinked, and answered, "I haven't been drinking any more than I usually do, but I sure feel woozy-doozy all of a sudden. Why are you wearing that goddamn rosewater cologne?"

"Rose water?" Randy frowned, sniffing.

"All the men I run into lately seem to be using that same faggy cologne. What's with you men, anyway? They got some sort of a special on rose water? Makes you smell like a bunch of goddamn funeral parlors!"

"Madam"—Randy smiled in mock seriousness— "I am absobloodylutely nude beneath my silks, but for a soupçon of Sandalwood Aftershave."

"What lies flat on its back and goes ding-dong?" Baby Jane Dough asked soberly.

"I give up." Randy smiled. "What lies flat on its back and goes ding-dong?"

"I'm *sick!*" Baby Jane Dough gagged, lurching to her feet.

Randy rose, but before he could untangle himself from the table the redhead had tottered off in the direction of the powder room.

Randy Kidd sat down again, stared morosely at the magnum of Mum's chilling in its crushed ice, and muttered, "Don't drink the water and don't breath the air. Or, like Hennesy, you'll need Frigidaire?"

"Talking to yourself again, sweetums?" a voice purred in his ear.

Randy smiled wryly up at Regina and answered, "Sit down, honey. You and I have a magnum of Mum's to split. My prey has escaped to the powder room."

"She'll be back," Regina laughed, sliding easily into the booth beside him. "The lady left her handbag."

Randy gazed judiciously at the green brocaded bag on the table and shook his head. "Don't think so," he explained. "Like, she went to the powder room to puke."

"You put things so *delicately*, darling," Regina muttered. "Meanwhile, what are we going to do about that overripe corpse in your bathtub?"

"Good question. What *are* we going to do? And while we're on the subject, what *were* you going to do?"

"Pardon?"

"Come on, Regina. With the thermometer!"

"Oh, you mean before you shot him with the kazoo?"

"I didn't know it was loaded. But seriously, doll, every time you climb into that kooky sex-and-sadism outfit and start waving thermometers and ball-peen hammers around . . . they *talk!*"

"That's the general idea." Regina yawned.

"But . . . I never get to see what in the hell you'd do if they didn't."

Regina laughed, displaying a mouthful of pearly perfect teeth that would have looked like an expensive cap job had it not been for the almost sinister sharpness of her slightly larger-than-normal canines. Then, fixing her blue feline eyes on her sidekick with sardonic curiosity, she asked, "What do *you* think I'd do, if a man refused to talk?"

"I don't know." Randy frowned. "I can think of several *possible* things you could do with a glass sliver full of mercury and a blunt instrument. None of them are very nice."

"Did you ever read *1984?* The part about Room 101?"

"Good book. But I can't remember what was so special about Room 101."

"Nothing." Regina shrugged. "It was just an empty room. But the torturers working for Big Brother saw to it that whatever a person feared most was waiting for him in Room 101!"

"I don't get it." Randy frowned, and then his eyes lit up and he gasped, "*That's* what makes them fall apart when you start waving glass thermometers around with

a wild look in your eye? They crack themselves up by imagining the worse possible trick we could be planning to play on them?"

"The worse possible trick for *them*, darling. No two men are liable to have the same possible details in mind, but none of them relish the idea of facing their own particular horror."

"Speaking of my own particular horror . . ." Randy frowned. "I wonder what ever happened to Baby Jane—Dough, that is."

"You said she'd got sick. Probably drank too much and turned some butterflies loose in her tummy. Why don't we quit while we're ahead?"

"I can't just cut out on her," Randy insisted.

Regina yawned sleepily and asked, "Why not?"

"For one thing, her pocketbook's lying here. Somebody might swipe it."

"Very well, why don't *you* swipe it?"

"What kind of a heel do you think I am?"

"I know what kind of a heel you are, darling. But you could always return it, if and when you felt the need to reestablish your . . . relationship."

"I," Randy Kidd said loftily, "do not steal ladies' pocketbooks."

"Leave it with the maître d', then."

"He *might* steal ladies' pocketbooks."

"Not unless there's something worth stealing, darling. Take a peak, and unless Baby Jane's been lucky at boule this evening or something, leave the damned thing and let's split!"

"A gentleman does not look in a lady's pocketbook while she's in the john." Randy frowned.

"That lets you off the hook, Randy dear. For goodness' sake, if *you're* so delicate, let me!"

"I saw her first!" Randy snapped open the expensive clasp and rummaged around inside Baby Jane's bag. He paused suddenly, let out a low whistle, and said, "I guess we'll have to wait around for Baby Jane after all, Regina."

"Why? Find something interesting?"

"Very. Three guesses as to what our innocent little jeterina's packing around in her pocketbook. The first two don't count."

Regina's brows rose in sudden interest as she asked, "A blue kazoo?"

"You muffed the color. This one's *purple!*"

Chapter SIX

"I don't know *why* I let you talk me into coming along," Baby Jane Dough grumbled, getting out of the elevator between Regina and Randy. She stared blearily down the seventh-floor corridor and added, "This place does absolutely nothing for me. I am not turned on. I think I am going to puke again."

"We'll find something for your tummy in Randy's pad, darling," Regina soothed, keeping a firm grip on the redhead's arm.

Holding Baby Jane by the other arm, Randy allowed his eyes to flick lightly over her handbag as he added, "Maybe we ought to take your temperature, doll. Have you still got that thermometer, Regina?"

"We'll take care of whatever ails her." Regina smiled. Randy, who knew that smile, repressed a slight shudder as, between them, they guided the still woozy redhead toward Randy's door.

They'd just reached it, and Randy had just removed the DON'T DISTURB! sign to put his key in the lock, when the elevator door opened again and three men got out.

"We seem to have timed that rather neatly," one of the men said. He was wearing beige pongees and horn-rimmed glasses. He was the CIA man Randy remembered from earlier that evening. The one who'd gone out the window rubbing the seat of his pants.

The other two were both wearing the khaki uniforms of the Republican Guard. They were also wearing pistol belts. With pistols. Big ones.

"We were just leaving," Randy said. Smiling, he deftly turned the key in the lock and put the DON'T DISTURB! sign in place. He turned to the girls and added, "Shall we?"

"Shall we what?" Baby Jane muttered. "You told me you were going to introduce me to a big Hollywood pro-

ducer who was going to star me in his next picture, and all we've been doing is wandering around in this goddamn smelly hallway!"

"It is smelly," the CIA man agreed. "Why don't we go inside, where we can be comfortable?"

"I don't smell anything," Randy said truthfully, "and you wouldn't like it in there. The air conditioning's out, and if you think this *hall* stinks—"

"I didn't say it was stinky—I said it was *smelly!*" Baby Jane Dough blurted. "Everybody in Los Perros is using that same awful rose water!"

Randy looked in genuine confusion at Regina, who looked back and shrugged her ivory shoulders in a gesture that told him she was as much in the dark as he was. Since any topic of conversation was better than the possible contents of his pad, Randy said in an argumentative tone, "What's with this rose water bit? Any of you guys smell roses?"

Neither of the local fuzz answered. Possibly because neither of them spoke English. The CIA man, however, sniffed judiciously and said, "It does smell sort of like roses in the hallway." He sniffed again and added, "Sort of like those faded rose petals you find laying in the bottom of the hearse after a funeral."

"I've never been laid in a hearse," Baby Jane Dough answered absently. Then her eyes brightened in sudden interest as she mused, "I wonder what that . . . Nah, a girl's got to draw a line *someplace!*"

"I," Randy Kidd insisted, "do not smell a damned thing."

"I smell stale cigar smoke." Regina frowned. "And the lingering refrain of Chanel Number Five with a whiff of garlic."

"But no roses?"

"Not a single rose."

"You are both nuts," the CIA man insisted. Then he smiled and added sarcastically, "But then, that's no news either. Let's go inside, Kidd, and see if that's where the funny smell's coming from."

"Let's not and say we did," Randy said, smiling back. "Honest, guys, it's been swell but we've got to split."

"Just a teenyweeny peek?" the CIA man asked.

"Got a teenyweeny search warrant?" Randy replied.

"You forget"—the man in the pongee suit shrugged—"that you are in Los Perros. These boys don't believe in search warrants."

"What do they believe in?" Randy inquired.

The CIA man spoke rapidly in Spanish to the uniformed men, and quite suddenly Randy found himself staring down the muzzles of two Colt .45 automatics.

"Any further questions?" the man in the pongee suit asked mildly.

Randy Kidd thought about that. He thought about the fact that there was a dead man in his bathtub. A man that he'd shot with a poison dart, even if he hadn't known the kazoo was loaded. And then he thought about the fact that he was outgunned and had never, up until that moment, shot an agent of the U.S. Government. Wryly, he shrugged and, re-turning the key in its lock, asked, "Won't you come into my parlor?"

"I'll see about fixing you boys something to drink," Regina trilled, switching on the lights and deftly maneuvering her shimmering blue self between Randy's unexpected guests and the bathroom door.

"I'm not supposed to drink on duty." The CIA man frowned.

"Just a teenyweeny gin and tonic while you take your teenyweeny peek, lover?" Regina insisted, steering him toward the small portable bar Randy had set up in the corner.

"Well, it *is* pretty stuffy in here," the man conceded. "Make mine weak, though. I'm more interested, right now, in the ice than the booze."

Randy shot Regina an agonized look, but the Blue Queen, not batting an eyelid, purred, "I'm afraid we've used up all our ice, darling. But trust me—I'll make it weak."

She did. The first time. The second drink was a bit

stronger, and by the time the CIA man, whose name turned out to be Howard Hardiman, had downed his third gin and tonic, he was becoming decidedly less aggressive. The two guardsmen he'd brought with him had also mellowed to the point of putting away their pistols and wrapping themselves around a few stiff ones, when Baby Jane Dough cast a certain pall over the proceedings by proclaiming in a loud voice that she was going to be sick again. "Where's the john?" she asked.

"It's out of order!" Randy blurted. "The, ah, gizmo won't framden."

"I don't want to use the gizmo, I wanna puke." Baby Jane gagged, tottering toward the closed door of Randy's hastily improvised slumber room.

Before anyone could stop her, the swivel-hipped redhead had opened the door and was screaming, "Where's the *light?*"

"Bulb's burned out!" Randy shouted back, as the door slammed in his worried face. He looked across the bar at the Blue Queen, who merely raised one eyebrow in a wait-and-see attitude and handed one of the guardsmen his fourth or fifth drink.

"About that blue kazoo, Randy." Hardiman suddenly smiled, remembering what he'd come up here for in the first place.

"Blue Kazoo?" Randy answered, not taking his eyes from the bathroom door as, to his dismay, a sudden crack of light from the bottom betrayed the fact that Baby Jane had found the lightswitch after all.

"The thing you were talking to me about before," Hardiman insisted. "I thought you were ribbing me until I phoned the office. They'd sort of like to have a look at this blue kazoo of yours."

"Of mine?" Randy shrugged, wondering why the girl in the john hadn't screamed when the lights went on.

"You said *something* about it," Hardiman insisted, blinking in confusion as the fumes from the last potent mixture Regina had handed him reached his already fogged brain.

"Have another gin and tonic, lover," Regina cut in.

"Later," Hardiman said, "after we finish searching the place."

"For a blue kazoo?" Randy smiled. He winked at Regina and added, "This guy must go over great at conventions. Bet he drops paper bags full of water on people from his hotel window!"

"That's *my* line." Hardiman frowned. He turned to Regina and explained, "He stole that crack from *me!*"

"Along with your blue kazoo," Regina soothed. "Or was it your lavender Yo-Yo?"

"You're trying to confuse the issue," Hardiman growled, going over to the bathroom door. He banged on it several times with his fist and bellowed, "Open up, this is a kazoo raid!"

"Go away," a distant voice wailed. "I'm throwing up."

"Well, hurry up about it," Hardiman snorted. Then he turned to Randy and said, "Take off your clothes."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You heard me." Hardiman snapped something in Spanish, and the two guardsmen, with bleary-eyed good humor, started turning things upside-down.

Randy looked at Regina for some clue as to what he was supposed to do now, but the Blue Queen merely smiled, said, "We'll have to do as the man says, darling," and started to undress.

"I didn't say that *you* had to take your clothes off, Miss Regina!" Hardiman gasped as the Blue Queen started slithering out of her blue sheath like a snake shedding its skin.

Regina fixed him with wide-eyed innocence and asked, "Didn't they tell you to search for this magenta boomerang of yours?"

"Yeah, but they just said to search Mr. Kidd."

"How *insulting!*" Regina pouted, letting her shimmering gown drop in an elecric-blue puddle around her ankles. One of the guardsmen brought his head up from under the bed where he'd been searching just in time to

catch the full impact of the Blue Queen's lush flesh as she stood demurely in her completely nude glory.

"*Madre de Dios!*" He gasped, turning beet red and completely forgetting what this stupid *gringo* from the American State Department had told them to look for.

As if to remind him, Regina cooed, "Are you boys satisfied?"

"No," Hardiman gulped, "but I'll take your word for it that you don't have a blue kazoo or anything else on you, Miss Regina!"

Just then the bathroom door opened, and Baby Jane Dough lurched out, still looking a little green around the gills. She blinked a couple of times at the sight of Regina standing in the altogether and Randy down to his shorts and socks, and then she brightened and said, "Wheeeeee!"

"This is an official search," Hardiman began, red-faced.

But Baby Jane cut him off with, "Who's *asking*, lover? Help me with this goddamn zipper!"

"You don't understand, Miss Dough. We're looking for a blue kazoo, and—"

"Ours not to reason why," Baby Jane recited, "ours but to unzip or die. Why the hell are the three of you taking so long to get undressed?"

"I'm supposed to be on *duty!*" Hardiman insisted, weakly.

Baby Jane Dough plastered herself against him and murmured, "The *zipper*, daddy. I can't reach it myself."

"You seem to have recovered rather quickly, dearie," Regina purred. "Would you like to look in our handbags, Mr. Hardiman?"

"Miss Dough's not under suspicion," Hardiman murmured, as soon as he was able to come up for air. "They told me to search Mr. Kidd and his suite for . . . What the hell *was* I looking for?"

"A purple kazoo?" Regina asked innocently.

"Blue, dearie," Baby Jane mewed, pulling away from Hardiman long enough to retrieve her handbag from Randy's bar. She opened it, dumped the contents out on

the bar, and said, "Be my guest, old Hard . . . iman? Will *somebody* unzip this damned dress?"

"Let me," Randy said, smoothly gliding up behind her in time to run his hands over her flanks and his eyes over the spilled contents of her handbag. She was, as far as he could tell, concealing nothing resembling a kazoo, blue, purple, or otherwise, in her handbag or anywhere else.

"We'll just check the john," Hardiman mumbled, suddenly acting very stiff and dignified, as only a man who knows he's had too much to drink can act. Randy tried to block him with Baby Jane's slender body, but the CIA man sidestepped and lurched toward the bathroom door on relentless, though somewhat rubbery, legs. Since Randy's gun was being examined with ill-concealed envy by one of the guardsmen going through his clothes, there wasn't a thing the Blue Queen's sidekick could do to stop Hardiman as the latter went inside, flipped on the switch, and bellowed, "What the hell are you trying to pull, Kidd?"

"Me?" Kidd asked innocently. "Nothing but a zipper, dad." He unzipped Baby Jane Dough's dress as far down as her waistline, noting with sudden interest that since, like Regina, the redhead was wearing absolutely nothing under her green-brocade dress, her more outstanding features were completely natural. Normally, he would have received the news more gallantly, but somehow the charms of Baby Jane didn't turn him on quite as much as they might have had not a U.S. Government agent been bellowing at him from the doorway while two tipsy guardsmen, hands casually placed on gun butts, regarded him with renewed interest.

"You said you had no ice." Hardiman frowned. "You stood right there with your bare faces hanging out and told me you had no ice, and all this time you've been hoarding *tons* of it in there!"

"Ice?" Randy blinked. "Have we got ice?"

"Have you got ice? You've got a bathtub full of it!"

Before Randy could think of a suitable reply, Baby

Jane Dough had peeled off her green-brocade dress and, with a graceful twist of her slender nude body, flourished it in a flashing parody of a bullfighter's cape pass.

One of the confused but delighted Republican Guards pulled out his pistol, fired a shot into the ceiling, and shouted, "Holay!"

"*Toro! Toro!*" The redhead laughed, stamping her high heels and waving her dress mockingly at the guardsman. The latter, shaking plaster dust from his hair, lowered his head, reholstered his gun, and, with one index finger sprouting hornily from either temple, charged.

Baby Jane passed her tempestuous charger with a beautifully executed Veronica. The guardsman, head still lowered, ran full-tilt into the wall, bounced off, sat down, and managed a weak "Holay!" before passing out on the rug.

"One down and two to go," mused Randy, *sotto voce.*

Not so *sotto*, however, that Regina missed it. As Hardiman strode forth, demanding all sorts of explanations about what he'd found in the bathtub, the Blue Queen deftly slipped a hand inside his pongee dinner jacket, whipped Hardiman's belt from around his waist, and, flourishing the CIA man's sole means of sartorial support, triumphantly shouted, "Sadism, anyone?"

"You give that back!" Hardiman gasped, clutching desperately at his pants as they started to fall down.

"*Hit* him!" Baby Jane Dough burbled. "Any man who wears lavender shorts *deserves* to be beaten!"

"What," a loud voice roared from the door leading out to the hallway, "is going on here, Hardiman?"

"Captain," Hardiman said in utter misery, to the man who'd just burst in on the happening, "I wish to hell I knew!"

"We're having an orgy," Baby Jane explained. "You're just in time for the sadistic foreplay. Why don't you take off your clothes and—"

"This is a disgrace to the CIA!" The newest member of the intimate little group bellowed, as primly as one *can* bellow. Randy recognized him as the man who'd been in

charge of the bunch who'd interviewed him the evening his French girlfriend had jumped out his window.

Hardiman gave the CIA superior a name by saying, "Honest, Captain Ahern, we came up here looking for that blue kazoo, just like you told us to, and—"

"Found a bathtub full of ice," Baby Jane cut in. "Now that we know where the ice is, why don't we all get stoned?"

"None for me, thanks." Randy gagged, remembering something else that had been in the tub with the ice. Come to think of it—he frowned—Hennesy should have still been there. Could Hardiman be *that* drunk?

As if he'd just wondered the same thing, Captain Ahern started for the bathroom, muttering, "What's all this about ice? And for Pete's sake, Hardiman, pull those pants up."

He paused thoughtfully in the doorway, hand on the knob, and added, "Those are not government-issue shorts, Hardiman."

"No, sir," Hardiman confessed guiltily. "My red-white-and-blue shorts are in the laundry. I, ah, borrowed these from a friend."

"*Lavender* shorts, Agent Hardiman? What sort of friends have you been hanging out with? Your security clearance didn't say anything about your being a possible security risk, but—"

"Ask them about the ice, Captain," Hardiman insisted, a trifle desperately. "Ask them why they made us drink warm gin and tonic with a whole bathtub full of ice in there!"

"You've been drinking, too?" Ahern frowned, ducking his head inside the john for a moment before reappearing, to ask, "How long have you been hanging around with alcoholic *preverts*, Agent Hardiman?"

"I was cold sober until this Randy character shot me with a kazoo," Hardiman insisted.

Ahern looked thoughtfully at his befuddled agent and asked, very quietly, "Mr. Kidd shot you, with a kazoo?"

"I didn't know it was loaded," Randy added.

"He *did*, dammit!" Hardiman insisted, noting the incredulous look in his superior's watery blue eyes. He pulled his pants up with injured dignity and added, "That's why I had to change my shorts. This dingaling shot me with a dart or something and made a bloody mess of my red-white-and-blue shorts."

"How about that, Kidd?" Ahern asked, fixing Randy with a stern look worthy of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. "Did you or did you not shoot one of my agents with a kazoo?"

"Or any other weapon?" Regina added helpfully.

"Madam, will you kindly put your clothes on and keep quiet?" Ahern growled. He glared at Baby Jane Dough and added, "*Both* of you."

"Party pooper." Baby Jane pouted.

"Can I put *my* clothes on, Captain? Randy asked.

"I wish you would. And about shooting Hardiman, Kidd . . ."

"I only did what any redblooded American boy would do to a man wearing lavender underwear."

"That's a lousy *canard!*" Hardiman shouted.

"Speaks French, too?" Regina laughed. She shot Baby Jane an arch look of co-conspiracy and purred, "No wonder the party was such a dull thud."

"Dammit!" Hardiman gagged. "Now I think *I'm* going to be sick!"

"It's the rose water," Baby Jane Dough said soberly, as the drunken CIA Agent staggered weakly into the john and slammed the door.

"Rose water?" Ahern sniffed.

"He uses rose water perfume, too." Randy smiled, buttoning his shirt with the practiced grace of one used to dressing, and undressing, in a hurry.

"We'll take that up with Hardiman later," Ahern muttered. "Meanwhile, let's talk about this mysterious kazoo."

"All right," Randy said. "Tell us about it."

"Tell *you* about it?"

"Of course. You're the guy who's making all the fuss about it."

"Are we busting into *your* room all hot and bothered?" Regina asked in a tone of sweet reasonableness.

Ahern stared blankly at the Blue Queen, who had somehow managed to slither back inside her too-tight gown, but before he could answer her, Randy asked, "Why don't you come clean, Captain? You're only making it harder on all of us by holding back information."

"Are you now, or have you ever been," asked Baby Jane Dough, "a member of the Communist Party or any Communist-front organization?"

"I refuse to answer," snapped Ahern, "on the grounds that anything I say may— What in the hell's the matter with you people?"

"Us people?" Baby Jane tittered. "*We're* all right, Jack. What's the matter with you and your pal in the purple panties?"

"We're on duty," Ahern snapped.

"Duty, schmuty. I think you're a couple of rosewater liberals."

"About the blue kazoo . . ." Ahern frowned, fixing Randy with a relentless stare and trying desperately to ignore Baby Jane Dough and her attempts to wiggle back into her dress with the consummate grace of a salmon swimming upstream . . . backward.

"Suppose," said Randy, "you start at the beginning."

"And when you get to the end, stop," added Regina. "When did you first hear of the blue kazoo, Captain darling?"

"Tonight," Ahern answered. "Hardiman phoned to say he'd been shot with some sort of dart and that Mr. Kidd had told him it had come from a blue kazoo owned by the mysterious Doctor Fang."

"I never caught his act." Randy smiled. "What does he play on his kazoo?"

"Murder, we think," Ahern answered. "Mass murder and utter madness. But then, *you* know why he was run out of Peking!"

"We do?" Randy blinked; then, catching a look from

Regina, he brightened and quickly added, "Oh, we sure *do*. Nasty business, what?"

"Too nasty for the Chinese Communists!" Ahern shuddered.

"That's about as nasty as you can get." Randy nodded. "Ah, what *was* this nasty we're talking about?"

"Don't *you* know?" Ahern blinked.

"Don't you?"

The CIA man shrugged and said, "We know that Doctor Fang proposed a new form of chemical warfare to the Peking Government and that the Chicoms were so horrified they placed him under house arrest, pending psychiatric examination. Of course, *everybody* knows what happened *then!*"

"Oh . . . sure." Randy nodded.

"We know Fang escaped, killing a half dozen of the guards placed over him, and made his way to the Soviet Embassy in Peking, seeking asylum. The Russians were delighted, of course."

"Of course. Russians delight easy."

"Well, Fang was a leading Chinese biochemist and he *had* been working on the Chicoms' most carefully guarded secret projects and he *did* have, or said he did have, China's newest and deadliest secret weapon in his hip pocket."

"For Pete's sake!" said Baby Jane Dough. "Are we gonna *talk* all night? I *hate* a man who only wants to *talk* about it."

"I'll fix you a drink, honey," Regina soothed, adding to the CIA man, "Go on, Captain darling, *I* think you're just the most interesting man I've met in just oodles of days!"

"The Russians took this Fang under their wing, right?" asked Randy.

"Wrong," said Ahern. "They wired a report to Moscow. New code we haven't broken yet. But we do know enough of it to know it had something to do with a mass-terror weapon. Just how Doctor Fang intended to keep his promise to hand over the major capitals of the world

without a scratch on them isn't too clear, but the Russians were pretty upset about it. Moscow wired back that Fang was to be liquidated and his papers utterly destroyed. This new weapon of Fang's scared the pants off them!"

"Speaking of pants," shouted Hardiman from the bathroom doorway, "how come everybody's gotten dressed?"

Ahern swiveled his head around to glare at his errant agent. His mouth opened, but nothing came out. Hardiman was no longer wearing lavender shorts. Hardiman was wearing absobloodylutely nothing.

Grinning wildly, the naked agent lurched into the room in the general direction of Baby Jane Dough. Then, catching sight of the Blue Queen's lusher figure near the bar, he burbled, "Decisions, decisions, decisions . . ." and headed for Regina, arms outstretched.

"See here, Agent Hardiman!" Captain Ahern sputtered, blocking the naked man's rush. "You're behaving like a madman!"

"I *am* mad!" Hardiman said, leering. "Sex mad! Let me at that gorgeous wench, dammit!"

Randy, gliding on the balls of his feet, moved in behind the naked agent and, as Hardiman struggled to get past his superior, threw a vicious karate chop that should have taken Hardiman across the back of the neck and put him to sleep for a while. It should have, but it didn't. As Randy swung, Hardiman bobbed his head down to gnaw on Ahern's collarbone. Randy's chop glanced off the top of Hardiman's skull and caught Captain Ahern across the bridge of the nose. Still clutching at Hardiman, Ahern staggered backward, tripped over the outstretched legs of the unconscious guardsman, and went down in a heap with Hardiman on top of him. The latter grinned wolfishly and laughed, "If you can't get a woman, get a clean old man!"

"I think," Regina murmured, "it's time we left."

"The party *is* getting rough," Randy mused, walking over to the door and opening it for Regina. He glanced

back at Baby Jane Dough, who'd wrapped herself around the remaining Republican Guard, and asked, "Coming, Baby Jane?"

"Not yet," the redhead sighed, "but if you'll flick off the lights on your way out . . ."

"Want me to try?" Randy muttered to Regina.

"He's got a gun," Regina muttered back. "Let's quit while we're ahead, lover. Were you able to stash the blue kazoo while I kept their eyes busy?"

"Is that why you went into your strip?" Randy laughed, leading Regina out into the hall and closing the door, after flicking off the lights and plunging a rather disgraceful scene into total darkness. He locked the door, pocketed the key, and then, taking the DON'T DISTURB! sign from the knob, said, "You may think my uncouth habit of chewing gum is infradig, doll, but chewing gum does have its uses."

He turned the card over. There, stuck to the back of it with a wad of Juicy Fruit, was the blue kazoo.

"Very clever," Regina laughed, as Randy pocketed the strange weapon of Doctor Fang—or *was* it Doctor Fang's? "Now, if we only knew who Baby Jane was working for and how she managed to hide what *she* hid . . ."

"The purple kazoo?" Randy shrugged as the two of them hurried down the hall toward Regina's larger suite. "That's easy. I can think of a dozen places nobody's looked . . . yet."

"I'm not talking about the kazoo, lover." Regina frowned. "I'm trying to figure where in the world she could have hidden Hennesy!"

"Hey!" Randy gasped. "I forgot about the corpse in the bathtub! How come nobody seems to have noticed him lying there with all that ice?"

"Because he wasn't there," Regina said, opening the door to her own suite. "I managed to take a peek while you were keeping Captain Ahern busy just now. Randy, are you *sure* he was *dead?*"

"Sure I'm sure." Randy shrugged. "I was in a war, and you get so's you can tell at a glance."

"Maybe," Regina mused, "but unless he just got up and walked away, Baby Jane Dough must have stuffed him in her . . . kazoo?"

"I need a drink," Randy sighed. "All this is a bit much. I don't mind the heat. I don't mind the humidity. But *thinking* is kind of rough in this climate. Got any gin?"

"In the kitchenette," Regina answered absently. "Have you another one of those darts, Randy?"

"Darts?" Randy blinked. "Sure. Be my guest." He took the blue kazoo from his pocket, blew into it, and sent a gray-tufted dart into the overstuffed chair near Regina.

The Blue Queen, who knew Randy's deadly accuracy with anything from a bullet to a baseball, neither flinched nor commented as the death-tipped needle plunked into the plush cushion a few inches from her hip. Instead, she said, "I'll do a chromatography on this thing while you mix the drinks. Make mine a tall one, lover. I'm beginning to think we're going to have a lot of trouble with this case before it's over."

"Likewise, I'm sure." Randy laughed. "By the way, who are we working for, Uncle Sam, the Russians, the Chicoms, or Doctor Fang?"

"I haven't decided," Regina answered, carefully pulling the dart from the chair and holding it up to the light. She walked across the room, opened a suitcase that happened to contain a chemistry set disguised as a makeup kit, and took out what looked, at first glance, like a box of tissues. There was paper in the box, but it wasn't cleansing tissue. Regina pinned a sheet of it to the open top of the suitcase and jabbed the point of the dart into it, near the bottom. She then took a bottle of solvent, eyedroppered the dart, and watched the greenish stain that spread out and up from the deadly steel tip.

"Soluble in solution A," she mused. "That figures, as fast as it spread through Hennesy's bloodstream. Now, if we can narrow it down on the PH scale . . . How are you coming with that drink, Randy darling?"

"Found the gin and the tonic," He answered. "Got any ice?"

"Should be some in the fridge."

Randy went over to the small refrigerator, opened it, and said a most unprintable word.

Regina looked up and said, "Randy! That was hardly called for—" And then the Blue Queen saw what was in the refrigerator and added a few unprintable thoughts of her own.

Seated in a fetal position, staring out at them glassily from the interior of the otherwise empty refrigerator, was the man Randy had shot with the blue kazoo. Hennesy was very pale, very dead, and, for some reason, grinning from ear to ear!

Chapter SEVEN

The Soviet Embassy in Los Perros was near the waterfront. So was everything else. Los Perros was a seaport, not a very big one. Regina tipped her taxi driver, nodded brightly at a sleepy-looking doorman wearing what might or might not have been a Russian uniform, and breezed into the marble-lined interior.

Her eyes, accustomed to the dazzling sunlight outside, took a few moments to adapt themselves to the dark, cavernous foyer. As always, there was a musty tea-and-incense sort of smell in the still air, and the rug beneath her feet had apparently been cut from the same bolt of red carpeting that issued in an endless stream from some underground factory in the Urals where Russian scientists desperately guarded their secret process for making thick piling that somehow emerged from the loom threadbare and faded. (Regina suspected the basic chemistry was somehow connected to the pretarnished gold-thread tassels that switched the lights off and on in brand-new Soviet jetliners.)

"You are wanting something?" a voice asked from the darkness.

Regina smiled at what appeared to be a gnome peering at her from behind a huge black onyx information desk and answered, "I want to see your intelligence chief, darling."

"You have appointment?"

"No. I'm just a li'l ol' American spy who happened to be in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop by."

The gnome thought about that for a while. Then he picked up a phone—one of those party-pooping things with a cowl that prevents anyone in the same room from hearing what's being said into the mouthpiece. He mumbled into the phone for a time, and then, hanging up, he smiled, displaying a truly frightening set of stain-

less-steel dentures, and said, "Is big mistake. Is no intelligence officer attached to this embassy. Is dedicated only to *peace!*"

"Oh, don't be silly, Russian honey. I've come to help you boys find out about Doctor Fang's plans to conquer the universe."

"Soviet Union does not interest self in conquest," the gnome said with a frown. "Soviet Union is dedicated to brotherhood of man and exploration of space. Here on Earth, all we want is peace!"

"Did you say peace or piece?" Regina muttered dryly. "I mean, you did interest yourselves in more than one piece, you know. Like, a piece of Poland, a piece of Hungary, even a little piece of Outer Mongolia, as I recall—"

"Enough!" the gnome shouted. "I am sitting here to give information, not to hear insults to Workers' Paradise! You are a bad woman. Go away."

"If you don't let me see your spy chief," Regina said grimly, "I'm going to make *trouble*."

"Trouble, schmouble." The Russian shrugged. "You are blocking my view of the front door, capitalist. Why you not go someplace and maybe play in traffic with other capitalist imperialist children?"

"I," Regina said, "am going to scream."

"So, scream already."

Regina screamed.

Loud.

Glass shattered, the crystals from the overhead chandelier started falling off, the doors opened all over the building as a distant voice shouted in Russian, "Holy Saint Andrew protect us! They've dropped the bomb!"

By this time the gnome was out from behind the onyx information desk and trying to shush Regina. She backed away, wailing, "Help! Sodomy! Unrequested cunnilingus!"

Dropping into a lower register and raising a small, hard fist, she added ominously, "You lay a hand on me, honey, and I'll knock you flat on your coccyx!"

"What is transpiring?" A loud voice bellowed.

"Oh, sir!" Regina whimpered, running over to a tall, burly figure in Soviet Army full dress and hiding behind him. "I came in here as a poor, simple girl, anxious to befriend the Red Army, and this . . . this *monster* made an indecent proposal!"

The burly Russian officer grinned at the bewildered information clerk and said, "Go away, monster. I, Igor Igorovitch Sonofapitch, will, ah, take care of this charming lady!"

"Comrade Sonofapitch!" the gnome sputtered. "She says she is American spy!"

"So? Come with me, American spy lady. We will talk about it over tea and caviar, eh?"

"I just love *tea*, officer honey," Regina purred, linking her arm in his and adding, "But those fish eggs make me urpy. Couldn't we send out for some chop suey?"

"Chop suey? In *Russian* Embassy?" Igor Igorovitch blinked. "Caviar, we got. Borsch, we got. Even beef stroganoff, we got. But chop suey? Phooey!"

"Moo goo gai pan?" Regina sighed, following the Russian into a large office lined with red velvet drapes and pictures of Lenin.

"We have drink," Igor said, striding over to a huge copper samovar and pouring the clearest-looking "tea" Regina had ever seen into an orange teacup. Igor waved her to a seat at one end of a leather soft and handed her the cup. He poured himself another and plopped down beside her. Raising his own cup, he said, "Here is to continued coexistence, American spy lady. What you say your name was?"

"Regina," the Blue Queen purred, "and I'm not really a spy, exactly. I'm a nightclub performer who dabbles at espionage."

"I am Igor." The Russian grinned. "And I'm not really a Red Army major, exactly. I'm a spy who dabbles at playing soldier.

Regina laughed, sipped from her cup, and gasped, "You call this stuff *tea?*"

"I call it vodka." Igor shrugged. "But Red Army does not drink on duty, so, if anyone comes, we call it tea. Are you in love with me, or do you have something else on your mind, spy lady?"

"It's early, Igor Honey, but you *are* sort of cute."

"I know." Igor nodded. "I started out in branch of MVD that specialized in seducing agents of other side. You in that branch of American CIA, darling?"

"I didn't know they had one," Regina purred, "but I do know someone who'd be interested. Can't we even have egg rolls and a little fried rice?"

"Egg *what?*"

"Egg rolls. I'm *hungry*, Igor daddy, and Chinese food turns me on the most."

"We have more vodka," Igor grumbled. "Later, if you are good spy lady, I send out to Chinaman's on corner. He is spy for People's Republic of China, but his lo mein is very good."

"You wouldn't be trying to get me *drunk*, Igor Honey?"

"Why do you think that, spy lady? Even without vodka, I, Igor Igorovitch Sonofapitch, am irresistible to womans!"

"Mmmmm, I *believe* you, Igor lover. But while we drink our demitasses, how about telling me what you're willing to pay for Doctor Fang?"

Igor's face went wooden as he sipped his vodka. Then, his voice carefully noncommittal, he asked, "You are prepared to deliver Doctor Fang?"

"On a silver platter, if the price is right."

"You know where he is?"

"Not exactly, but I think I can find him. For one thing, he keeps shooting darts at me."

"That sounds like Doctor Fang, pretty spy lady. Any other man would want give you kiss. Doctor Fang, Nut of the Universe, want give you Aphroditic Plague!"

"Is *that* what he wants to give me?" Regina purred, snuggling closer as Igor casually dropped his burly arm from the back of the sofa. "The chromatography test I

ran on one of his kazoo darts showed he'd dipped them in some alkaloid that works like German nerve gas."

"Nerve gas?" Igor snorted. "That is kid stuff, compared to what Fang usually shoots at peoples. Say—you got Chinese grandpapa?"

"Cherokee," Regina answered sleepily. "What was in that vodka, lover?"

"Little truth serum and aphrodisiac," Igor murmured tenderly. "After you spilling guts, spy lady, we making love, no?"

"Only if I get moo goo gai pan first." Regina smiled. It was a Mona Lisa smile, as if the Blue Queen were secretly pleased with herself.

She was. It was old. It was corny. But it had been worth a try. And Igor Igorovitch Sonofapitch hadn't noticed a thing when she switched cups with him.

Chapter EIGHT

Chinese Restaurants are hot and humid in any climate. In the sultry heat of noonday Los Perros, the Inn of the Gelded Dragon was even hotter. But nobody knows better than a spy that espionage is a hot and sticky business. What Lam Duck, the jovial-appearing proprietor of the Inn of the Gelded Dragon did *not* understand, at the moment, was why that crazy round-eyed devil in the third booth was willing to sit still for the steamy heat when he didn't have to!

"I'll have another order of flied lice," The stranger said, mopping his brow with a sweat-soaked silk handkerchief. Lam Duck shot Randy Kidd a look of pure animal hatred and, muttering something obscene in Mandarin, walked back into the fetid kitchen for another bowl of fried rice.

"He is not a Russian, Comrade Lam," his fat, moon-faced cook and part-time hatchetman whispered, peeking at Randy through the slats of the jalousied kitchen door. "I have run through my photo file on the staff of that thrice-accursed embassy down the street, and he is not attached to the Soviet intelligence cell."

"Why are you whispering?" Lam Duck grumbled. "He can't understand Mandarin. He's an American."

"How do you know?"

"He keeps asking for flied lice, the rotten son of a thousand-thumbed hunch-backed dwarf!"

"Don't they know *any* other take-offs on a Chinese accent?" The cook sighed.

"That is not the point," Lam Duck murmured. "What I want to know right now is *why* the Americans are watching the Russian Embassy from *our* blind!"

"Maybe," the cook said with a shrug, "the Russians have discovered that the used-book store across the street from them is owned by the CIA and the Americans, not

knowing that this is a Chinese blind, have decided to use it as an American blind?"

"Don't be absurd," Lam Duck snorted. "In the first place, the CIA no longer owns the used-book store. They sold it to the Yugoslav Embassy a week ago for Comrade Tito's spies to use as a Yugoslav blind!"

"The Yugoslavs didn't know the bookstore they were buying was an American-owned spy hideout?"

"Of course they did. But since the Russians think the men coming and going in and out of the used-book store are American spies, the Yugoslav spies have a certain advantage and . . . Never mind. Give me the goddamn fried rice!"

Muttering dark Cantonese, Mandarin, and Inner Mongolian swear words, Lam Duck padded out into the front part of the restaurant and slammed the steaming bowl of fried rice down in front of Randy Kidd. The latter, smiling wanly in the collar-wilting atmosphere, said, "Thanks. I think I'll have some more tea to go with the flied lice and maybe a couple of egg lolls."

"Oh, you velly funny," Lam Duck muttered. "You mus' go over big at conventions. You dloppee paper bag fulla watah out o' numbah-one hotel loom?"

"I say something long?" Randy asked innocently.

"Oh, no," Lam Duck sputtered. "Jus' goddamn silly 'Melican clack about flied lice."

"Whassamatah flied lice?" Randy asked.

"It's *fried rice*, you *plick!*" Lam Duck shouted, turning away to face a uniformed guard from the Russian Embassy and shouting, "Jesus J. Chlist! What *you* want?"

"One order of number-two plate and moo goo gai pan with two egg rolls," The Russian said blandly. "To go."

"That's my cue," Randy sighed, weakly lurching to his feet under a heavy burden of tea and fried rice. He left a fistful of the funny-money they used for currency in Los Perros on the counter and staggered out into the relative coolth of the sun-drenched street. Regina was okay, he knew. She'd got somebody in there friendly enough to send out for Chinese food, at any rate. And

once Regina had anybody that friendly, they didn't have a chance. He slipped the card she'd given him out of his pocket and glanced at it. Then he hailed a passing taxi.

Inside, Lam Duck watched with narrowed eyes as he packed the to-go order in a pasteboard box. In singsong Mandarin, he shouted, "Follow that American spy!"

"But Comrade Lam," the cook protested, "there's nobody here but myself; and you, forgive me, cannot boil water without burning it!"

"Are we running a restaurant or a spy blind, imbecilic offspring of a pederastic toad with revisionist tendencies? Never mind hanging up your thrice-accursed apron, damn you! *Follow* him!"

The Russian guard, looking sleepily confused by all this singsong banter, casually accepted the box of Chinese goodies and went outside. He waited until he was behind a palm tree and took off his hat. Speaking into a small radio transmitter concealed in the hat, he said in a low, urgent tone, "This is Agent M-59 reporting. A Chinese agent is following an American agent who has just left the Inn of the Gelded Dragon in a taxi driven by Comrade Shovov. Inform Shovov of Chinese on his tail and have him report destination of American spy after shaking Chinese spy off his trail. Over."

M-59 put his hat back on and walked unhurriedly back to the Russian Embassy, where Regina and her friend Igor were pumping each other full of vodka and, presumably, empty of secrets.

The palm tree waited until M-59 was safely out of earshot before it whispered into it's own radio transmitter, "Chumly here. There's something I think British intelligence should know. . . ."

It was dark and very very malodorous in the narrow alleyway. Randy wondered, as he picked his way through the pigs and chickens, why Hardiman had gone to so much trouble. Probably, he thought, the poor jerk had been reading spy novels again. He'd heard that after the

Bay of Pigs episode, U.S. agents were absolutely forbidden to read any more comic books like the one they'd got *that* idea from. But hardcover novels, although frowned upon, were not totally forbidden. And even in hardcover spy novels, spies hid out in malodorous alleyways, so—

"I say," a feminine voice murmured from a nearby window. "You're being followed, you know."

Randy paused, nodded politely to the brunet sitting at a nearby window, and asked, "British intelligence?"

"Oh dear, I did so hope that *this* cover would hold up. My accent gives me away, I take it?"

"Your cover does, doll." Randy smiled, gazing admiringly at the lushly stacked girl in the Latin American peasant blouse and circle skirt. "Nobody else looks as convincing as you Limies. Russians are pretty good. Germans are almost as bad as Americans. You and the French do the best job of blending into the scenery. How'd you manage that faint Spanish mustache?"

"Eyebrow pencil," the British girl admitted. "The brown eyes are contact lenses, of course. And my hair is blond, usually."

"I like blonds no matter what color hair they have," said Randy gallantly. "Who's following me, by the way?"

"Can't say, actually. Got a message that an American spy was coming up the alley followed by a Chinese spy followed by a Russian spy followed by someone else!"

"You wouldn't care to shoot a couple of them for me, would you?" Randy asked. "I could mosey on past that turn, and as they entered the alley you could pick them off like sitting ducks."

"Chinese and Russian Agents?" She frowned, shaking her head. "Make it devilishly sticky with the Home Office. Hong Kong and the Common Market, you know."

"Russia's not in the Common Market."

"France is."

"Hmmm, I see what you mean. Well, if you can't shoot anyone for me, how about having dinner with me? What time do you get off duty?"

"I could meet you any time after tea," the girl answered.

"Fine, how about the lobby of the Casino Cabrones around five? My name's Randy, by the way."

"Mine's Cynthia—off duty, that is. Right now I'm señorita Felicidad, and you should hear the things the other ladies in this neighborhood say about me!"

"Are they true?"

"Only when I'm on duty. We British agents are very dedicated, you know. I've got to go now, Randy. That bell means the madam has another customer. I do so hope it's not another damned sailor!"

"Toodles!" Randy called, as Cynthia/Felicidad vanished into the dark interior of the parlor house. He continued on down the alleyway, debating whether to ambush the Chinese spy who was following him.

It would make a lot of noise, he knew. And they might get him for littering.

He could always do some deucedly clever backtracking, but it was devilishly hot, and even if he managed to shake the others off his tail, they indubitably knew where he was going, unless the CIA man he'd come to see wasn't the only spy living in this dank and malodorous alley. (Felicidad/Cynthia, of course, *worked* there.)

Again consulting the card Regina had given him, Randy saw that he was looking for number 37, Paseo de las Mariposas. He was having enough trouble finding the number without wondering why they called this pig- and chicken-infested slot the Alley of the Butterflies. Some of the houses seemed to have numbers, in no particular sequence, while others were identified by obscene graffiti or, apparently, the color of the pig sleeping in the doorway.

Randy was standing in uffish thought, torn between a white pig sleeping in a blue doorway and a pinkish-brown porker dozing before a yawning emptiness where once, long, long ago, a door might well have been, when a large washerwoman type stepped out of the cavern,

kicked the pinkish-brown pig off the sill, scratched her belly, and glared at him.

"I," explained Randy, in Spanish, "am looking for señor Hardiman, the American."

"There are only two Americans living in this alley, *muchacho*," the woman answered. "Are you looking for the American who works for Coca-Cola or the American spy?"

"I just had a pause that refreshes," Randy sighed. "Where can I find the spy?"

"He lives upstairs, *muchachito muy toro*. But he is not at home. Why do you not come up to *my* room and wait for him, eh?"

"Any other time, señorita," Randy gulped, "I would be delighted to keep you company. But you see . . ."

"I don't look like much," the woman conceded, "but you can't beat experience, and I have half a bottle of fortified muscatel on ice."

"Glug," muttered Randy, his momentary interest in her rather startling bustline quailing before the sick certainty that anyone who drank like a barbarian made love like a slob. Aloud, he said, "You are tempting me out of my everloving mind, señorita—"

"Call me Gordita, my handsome *toro!*"

"Señorita Gordita, you are sweeta, and I'm glad to meetcha." Randy nodded gallantly. "But I gotta see a spy about a stiff in a refrigerator, so if you don't mind—"

"Kiss me, you fool!" Gordita moaned, closing her eyes and swaying toward him with pudgy arms Jolsoned out to him. Randy, taking advantage of her temporary blindness, deftly sidestepped and made an end run around the overweight nymphomaniac as Gordita, still moving forward in her beautiful-dreamer trance, tripped over the brown pig and fell headlong into the alley. The last Randy saw of her, as he scuttled backward down the dark hallway like a crawfish ducking into its burrow, Gordita was sprawled in the mud, swearing mightily, while the pinkish-brown pig, its nose in the air, walked away.

Fortunately, the room number on the card Regina had given him was the right one, and by some miracle, there was actually a trace of the number left under several layers of peeling paint on Hardiman's door. Randy knocked, yelled a couple of times, and then, since there was no answer, picked the lock.

There were several rooms in Hardiman's pad. In the first room, Randy found a size-nine dress and a black silk stocking.

In the second room, he found a size-fourteen dress, two black mesh stockings, a pair of black-lace panties, and a Playtex Living Bra.

In the third room he found a size-twelve kimono (red rayon sateen, with a golden dragon, yet), a pair of cork-soled, wedgies, numerous hairpins of several colors, twelve empty bottles of various brands, and . . . Hardiman.

The CIA man was lying spread-eagled on a rumpled brass bed, a smile of dreamy contentment on his face. As nearly as Randy could judge, from the stiffness of his limbs, he'd been dead for about four or five hours.

There were feminine footsteps in the other room, and Randy sighed, "Really, señorita Gordita—" as he turned to face the open doorway behind him. But it wasn't Gordita. The girl in the doorway was a slender Oriental in a pale pink Mandarin dress. She was smiling at Randy, but it was not a pretty smile, and her almond eyes blazed with the cold triumph of a cat gazing at a cornered mouse.

Too late, Randy saw that she held in her dainty tapered fingers. Too late, his own hand streaked for the P-38 under his left armpit as the Oriental beauty raised the kazoo to her sensuous lips and blew.

The first dart hit Randy Kidd above the heart.

Chapter NINE

TOP-SECRET–BURN BEFORE READING

TO: OFFICE OF SOVIET MILITARY INTELLIGENCE, GENOCIDE SECTION. SUBJECT: PENETRATION OF LOS PERROS EMBASSY BY AMERICAN (?) AGENT. ITEM # 1: AS YOU KNOW, THIS SECTOR WAS WARNED BY KREMLIN OF THAT NOTORIOUS INTERNATIONAL MYSTERY SPY LADY REGINA, ALIAS THE BLUE QUEEN. WE HEREBY LODGE OFFICIAL PROTEST. YOU DID NOT WARN HOW DANGEROUS BLUE QUEEN REALLY WAS. OH, SURE, YOU TOLD US ABOUT FEW ASSASSINATIONS, REVOLUTIONS, AND OTHER KID STUFF SHE WAS INVOLVED IN, BUT DID YOU TELL US WHAT SHE WAS REALLY CAPABLE OF? LISTEN. . . .

THIS MORNING, SPY LADY REGINA WALK IN OFF STREET OFFERING TO TRADE MILITARY SECRETS ON TIT-FOR-TAT BASIS, ALL CARDS ON TABLE. VERY FUNNY. NATURALLY, COMRADE MAJOR SONOFAPITCH AGREE TO COEXISTENCE IN FACE OF MUTUAL ENEMY, DOCTOR FANG, MAD SCIENTIST BENT ON CONQUEST OF UNIVERSE. JUST AS NATURALLY, SONOFAPITCH SPIKE SPY LADY'S VODKA WITH TRUTH SERUM AND APHRODISIAC. ONLY . . . SOMETHING GO WRONG.

IGOR IGOROVITCH SONOFAPITCH NOT TOO CLEAR WHAT HAPPEN SHORTLY AFTER THEY START WRESTLE ON COUCH IN HIS OFFICE (WE QUESTION AGAIN AFTER HE RECOVER FROM FIRST INTERROGATION). BUT HE IS COMING TO CLUTCHING BLUE DRESS. EMPTY

BLUE DRESS. SPY LADY GONE. SO IS FILE ON DOCTOR FANG.

JUST LITTLE WHILE AGO, CONFUSED YUGOSLAV AGENT FROM AMERICAN-OWNED BOOKSTORE ACROSS STREET REPORTED TO HIS SUPERIOR (WHO IS REALLY GREEK IN PAY OF SHIPPING COMPANY SECRETLY OWNED BY SOVIET UNION) THAT HE IS SEEING NAKED BLOND LADY RUNNING ACROSS ROOFTOPS WHILE MAKING FAN DANCE WITH TWO LARGE MANILA ENVELOPES. WE ARE MISSING ENVELOPES AND SPY LADY WAS BLOND, BUT YUGOSLAV AGENT MAY HAVE BEEN DRUNK. HE IS ALSO REPORTING PALM TREE IN FRONT OF CHINESE RESTAURANT SHOUTING, "JOLLY GOOD SHOW!" AS SPY LADY JUMP FROM ROOF OF EMBASSY TO OFFICE BUILDING NEXT DOOR. IN FIRST PLACE, IS VERY LONG WAY TO JUMP, IN SECOND, IS NO PALM TREE IN FRONT OF CHINESE RESTAURANT. YUGOSLAV AGENT NOW UNDERGOING BRAINWASH IN BASEMENT OF ANTIQUE SHOP NEXT TO BOOKSTORE.

M-59

TO: SECRET SOVIET AGENT M-59
SUBJECT: INSTRUCTIONS FOR IDIOT SPIES
ITEM #1: SOVIET AGENT WORKING INSIDE BRITISH INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THERE IS PALM TREE IN FRONT OF CHINESE RESTAURANT. IS NAMED CHUMLY. OBVIOUSLY, WHEN YOU CHECKED YUGOSLAV'S STORY, YOU NEGLECTED TO ALLOW FOR FACT IT WAS TEA TIME. LOOK AGAIN AND TURN YUGOSLAV LOOSE.

COLONEL CHAVOSKY

TO: COLONEL CHAVOSKY
SUBJECT: PALM TREES

ITEM #1: ACCEPT HUMBLE APOLOGIES. THERE ARE, AT PRESENT, NOT ONE BUT TWO PALM TREES IN FRONT CHINESE RESTAURANT WILL TRY AND FIND OUT WHO SECOND ONE IS WORKING FOR BUT REGRET CANNOT TURN YUGOSLAV REVISIONIST LOOSE. HAS ALREADY CONFESSED.

M-59

The late-afternoon sun streaming through the jalousies at CIA Headquarters painted zebra stripes of light and shade on the star-spangled rug as Randy Kidd, gripping both arms of the big leather easy chair in Captain Ahern's office, waited to see if he would live.

A rubber tube, clamped to one of his upper molars, made it difficult to talk as it sucked parotid fluid from Randy's right-hand Stenson duct. His tongue kept tripping over the slurping tube as he tried, to the best of his ability, to reply to the captain's questions.

"You say you managed to get off a couple of shots at this Chinese broad, Kidd?" Ahern was asking. "What are the chances that you put one in her?"

"Not tho dood," Randy answered. "Like, thee wath dith-tractin' hell outa me with her kathoo fulla poithon darth!"

"I imagine it would throw a guy's aim off," Ahern mused, fingering one of the steel-tipped barbs they'd dug out of the piano-playing spy's chest shortly after a very disheveled Randy Kidd had staggered into CIA Headquarters, muttered, "Lafayette, we are here!" and collapsed on the star-spangled rug.

"Don't *touch* those darts, dammit!" snapped the other man in the room. It was the same little brown sparrow who'd officiated as medical examiner the night the French agent had jumped out Randy's hotel window. His name, Randy had just discovered to his slight dismay, was Doctor J. J. Crawllaway.

Ahern dropped the gray-tufted dart down beside the others on the desk Crawllaway was using at the moment

for his Frankensteinian experiments and, turning back to Randy, said, "How come you decided to come to us, Kidd? I thought you and the Blue Queen were playing this game out on your lonesomes."

"That was before this China doll put a fistful of darts in me," Randy answered, pulling the tube from his mouth. Crawllaway frowned up at him from the eyepiece of his microscope and said, "I can't collect parotid fluid without that tube in your mouth."

"I can't talk with it in," Randy said with a shrug. "What the heck do you need so much spit *for*, anyway?"

Crawllaway sniffed delicately and corrected his vulgarism by explaining, "Parotid fluid is not only a mirror image of blood, Mr. Kidd, but it possesses the added advantage of being remarkably clear and free of ordinary toxins you might have floating around in your veins. Since there is the slight possibility that you may be telling the truth about seeing a man die within seconds of being hit by one of these darts, we do not have time to muck about with the usual garbage people fill their bloodstreams with."

Doctor Crawllaway stopped talking as he syringed a few cubic centimeters of Randy's saliva into a high-speed miniature centrifuge and switched it on. While the centrifuge spun like a little glass helicopter rotor, he scratched the parchment-covered top of his bald skull and muttered, "*My* chromatography series does *not* show any trace of nerve gas or anything else as highly toxic as it would have to be in order to kill a man so swiftly."

"Maybe Kidd was shot with a different kind of dart," Ahern mused. "We ought to be able to dig some of the poison that killed this Hennesy out of Hennesy's stiff. Where did you say you'd hidden Hennesy, Kidd?"

"I didn't," Randy replied blandly. "And who said the guy's name was Hennesy? I just said, when I staggered in here, that I'd seen a guy go west after being nailed by a single dart. I didn't say I knew him personally."

"He knew you. Hardiman reported that he'd seen Hennesy, a notorious blackmailer and allaround bad guy,

go up in the elevator at your hotel. The elevator stopped on the seventh floor. When it came back down, Hennesy was not in it. *Ipso facto, Hennesy* went to see you and never came back. Also *ipso facto*, nobody else we're worried about is missing in Los Perros."

"How about Doctor Fang?"

"That's different. He's not missing, he's hiding."

"Maybe Hennesy's hiding too?"

"Then who *did* get hit with a poison dart, Kidd?"

"Me. I got hit with millions of them. How come I'm still alive, Doc?"

"That's a good question." Doctor Crawllaway shrugged. "We know it has something to do with your blood type. To date, all the people we suspect Fang of killing have had blood that did not, repeat *not*, contain the Diego factor."

"You mean, Fang's darts don't work on Chinese, Amerinds, or anybody who's part Mongoloid?"

"Wrong. The Diego factor is found only among people of Mongoloid or remotely Mongoloid ancestry. But actually, only a small percentage of Orientals have that type of blood. About fifteen percent of those having O-type blood. Naturally, while Orientals have a statistically higher number of individuals with O than other races, this does not mean that *all* Orientals have any such thing."

"Then"—Randy frowned—"Fang's darts kill all Caucasians and Negroes but only *most* Orientals or part Orientals?"

"That's about the size of it." Ahern nodded. "But until now we haven't had anyone die as suddenly as you say Hennesy did. Mostly . . . they die like poor Hardiman."

"How *did* Hardiman die?" Asked Randy.

Ahern blushed slightly as he replied, "He, ah, *loved* himself to death."

"What a way to go!" mused Randy. Then, as what Ahern had said sank in, he blinked, "*What* did you say he did?"

"You heard me. He died just like several of our other

agents and that poor French girl who jumped out your window. He died, apparently, from heart strain and complete nervous exhaustion following an absolutely impossible display of sexual prowess!"

"And *that's* what killed the French girl?"

"Don't be absurd," Doctor Crawllaway snorted. "The fall from the seventh-story window is what *killed* her!"

"But if she'd been hit with one of these thigamajigs and driven out of her skull by raving nymphomania . . . isn't it possible that that was what she meant when she said she couldn't stand it any more?"

"Perhaps." Crawllaway smiled thinly. He didn't smile much, Randy had noticed. Had a frozen puss made out of old lampshades, wore a Hoover collar, and looked like he'd been raised on spinach, prunes, and castor oil. The medical examiner stopped the centrifuge, held a test tube of well-spun saliva up to the light, and muttered, "Meniscus level is a little high. You feel dizzy? Have any trouble breathing?"

"I sure did right after she shot me." Randy nodded. "Legs turned to rubber and I thought I was going to pass out."

"You should have," Crawllaway mumbled disapprovingly. "You must drink a lot, Mr. Kidd. You have a very high tolerance for anesthesia."

"Anesthesia?" Ahern cut in. "You mean these darts are tipped with knockout drops?"

"Some concentrated intramuscular drug like succinylcholine chloride or perhaps something stronger. In the dosage needed to render a two-hundred-pound man unconscious, it's almost impossible to isolate it." He nodded in frosty modesty as he added, "*Most* examiners would find it *completely* impossible."

"Okay. If they nailed me with some sort of super Mickey Finn, what did they shoot into Hardiman?"

"We don't know," Crawllaway answered simply. "We've autopsied, chemically analyzed, and run animal-serum tests on every corpse who's died in Fang's gro-

tesque vendetta with society, and so far we're completely in the dark."

"I still think it'll turn out to be something like Spanish fly," Ahern snorted.

"There is no known chemical that acts that way on the human nervous system. Period!" Doctor Crawllaway snapped.

"Come on, Doc. I've heard stories—"

"They are not true," Crawllaway insisted. "There are a few very dangerous chemicals that, used in the right dosages, will alter, modify, or seemingly arouse sexual desire in the human being. But *none* of them will make any sane human being behave in the way Fang's victims have behaved. Do you recall that Algerian agent in Bucharest who died, smiling, after making love to the entire crew of a Greek naval vessel?"

"She must have been *really* turned on!" Randy whistled.

Ahern and the doctor exchanged glances, and then Crawllaway, smiling ever so thinly, answered, "What do you mean, *she?*"

Randy blinked, started to ask a question, then shrugged and muttered, "To each his own. One thing does bug me, though, Doc."

"What's that?"

"This kazoo business. I mean, according to everything the free world knows, this crazy Doctor Fang was run out of China for proposing some hideous weapon too terrible for the Chicoms to consider."

"So?"

"So he's going to take over the world by shooting everybody with a kazoo? What's so horrible about that?"

"You've got to admit it's a hell of a way to die," Ahern suggested.

Randy pursed his lips, remembering the smile on the face of Hardiman's corpse, and answered, "That's debatable. But even if it *is* rough on the victims, so what? I mean, how long would it take Doctor Fang to wipe out enough people to matter if he had to creep up behind them and plunk a kazoo dart into them?"

"He could recruit an army," Ahern answered. "If he had a few thousand guys, armed with poison kazoos . . ."

"What's the matter with an army armed with machine guns?"

"Pretty unimaginative." Doctor Crawllaway frowned.

"Yeah, but effective. You say the victims go nuts and make love all over the place until they wear themselves to a frazzle and die. Okay. So they're dead. So what? They'd be just as dead with a bullet in them, and the good doctor wouldn't have to worry about people like Regina and me who happen, somehow, to be immune to his gunk."

"Not gunk," Crawllaway objected. "Some highly refined and hitherto unsuspected toxic substance affecting the sensory centers of the cerebral cortex while numbing or overriding the prefrontal lobes and—"

"I still say it's Spanish fly," Ahern cut in. "Is he going to be okay, Doc?"

"*Okay* is a relative term. If you mean, do I think he will survive and even manage to function at his usual somewhat uncouth level, I would say the prognosis is favorable."

"Uses big words," Ahern whispered. "Let's go, Kidd."

"Sure." Randy brightened, getting up and slipping his jacket back on. "Where are we going? Oh, and by the way, what ever happened to my P-38?"

"You'll get it back when I feel like giving it to you," Captain Ahern growled. "But first you're going to show me this guy you shot with the blue kazoo."

"I am?" Randy blinked. "I've got a date at the casino this evening, Captain."

"With a British agent named Cynthia Forsyth." Ahern nodded. "A sailor who visited her at her cover this afternoon already told us about that. You working for *them*, this time?"

"You know how hard it is to convert pounds sterling, Captain." Randy shrugged. "This is like a *social* engagement!"

"So you'll have to go by your hotel to freshen up, won't you?"

Randy started to shake his head. Then he pictured the mess he was after falling down a flight of stairs and crawling the length of the Alley of Butterflies with a bevy of steel-tipped darts imbedded in his flesh and sighed. "I guess I *could* use a shower."

"I'll just come along, then," said Ahern.

"I don't know . . ." the pianist mused. "My shower's a little small for the two of us."

"I'm more interested in the tub." Ahern smiled. It was a funny sort of smile. Randy wondered what the CIA chief meant by it. He didn't have to wonder for long as Ahern added, "I've been sort of thinking about that tub full of ice, and a picture is beginning to emerge from the mists."

"I imagine it's pretty well melted by now," Randy said blandly, allowing Ahern to open the door for him. As they were walking down the corridor to the entrance, he asked, "By the way, did you guys leave *any* of my booze?"

"I'm not sure," Ahern growled. "By the time I recovered from your karate chop the party had turned into a real brawl. I was too busy defending my honor to notice who was drinking what."

"Defending your honor?" Randy smiled. "From Hardiman or from Baby Jane Dough? By the way, who *is* Baby Jane Dough?"

"We don't have a file on her." Ahern shrugged. "Just some millionaire's daughter with more money than brains, I imagine. Hardiman, in one of his more lucid moments, said something about her having come from that hoity-toity yacht in the harbor. The one they had the brawl on over the weekend."

By this time they were in Ahern's car and speeding toward the hotel where Randy and Regina were staying. The CIA man was driving, while Randy lounged beside him in the suicide seat. They were doing perhaps forty miles an hour down Las Palmas Boulevard, when a large panel truck shot out of a driveway, completely blocking the street.

"Go around it, across the lawn!" Randy shouted, reaching automatically for his nonexistent P-38 as a dozen men, led by a familiar figure in a pink Mandarin dress, came boiling out of the panel truck. But Ahern, following the usual instincts that get us all killed in such situations, had stepped on his brakes and slid to a panic stop a few feet from the panel truck.

"Roll the windows up!" Randy shouted, doing just that as the Oriental beauty in the pink dress fired her kazoo. The poison dart spanged into the rising glass a few inches from Randy's left eye as, from the other side, Ahern swore and clapped a hand to the side of his cheek.

"They got me!" he exclaimed. Randy wondered what else was new as Ahern slumped against him. He reached inside the CIA man's coat and drew Ahern's .38 Colt Cobra with one hand while frantically trying to duck the darts that came whipping through the open window on the fallen agent's side of the stalled car.

Most of them were being sent his way by a frantic-looking cat with Indian features, a pair of dark glasses, and a bebop beard left over from the Dizzy Gillespie era. He had a purple kazoo to his lips, and at the moment, he was not playing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

A little while later, he wasn't playing anything. Randy nailed him with the second shot from Ahern's gun and, noting that the Cobra fired a little higher than his own P-38, adjusted his aim accordingly and sent a second kazoo shooter backflipping into a hibiscus bush with a bullet in his brain.

That took care of the fiendish minions of Doctor Fang on one side of the car, but they were still pinging poison darts all over the other side. Shaking Ahern, Randy yelled, "Where's *my* gun?"

"I'm dying," Ahern muttered. "I wish you people had stayed away from Los Perros. Since you and the Blue Queen arrived I've had so much trouble it feels like this script was written by Boris Pasternak!"

"We'll both be as dead as old Boris, Doctor Zhivago,

of you don't tell me where I can lay my hands on some serious-minded artillery!"

"Could you . . ." Ahern gasped, "use a machine gun?"

"It might help." Randy smiled, grimly.

"Clamped to the back of the seat," Ahern mumbled, closing his eyes again.

Randy felt in back of him, and as his lean, muscular fingers closed over cold steel, he grinned wolfishly and said, "Bingo!"

Then he opened the door on the far side from the main body of dart blowers, braced the barrel of a Thompson submachine gun across the hood of the car, and said, "And *now*, boys and girls . . ."

He killed only three of them.

The others, once they'd got the message that the thing in Randy's hand really was what it looked like, had scattered to the four corners of the universe, screaming protestations of innocence and calling down the wrath of the gods on the heads of people who sent poor, unwary thugs out with nothing but kazoos after people armed with machine guns.

One of the running figures was wearing a pink Mandarin dress, slit up the side as far as the thigh. It was just as well for her that it was. She was making good time, displaying a remarkable amount of shapely female flesh in the process, as Randy tap-danced a line of machine-gun bullets across the lawn at her. He'd have shot her lovely legs out from under her in another couple of rounds had not the Oriental girl, in a sudden cunning display of broken-field running, sidestepped around a palm and taken a head-first dive over a garden wall.

There was the sound of a mighty splash, followed by an even mightier one as Randy, running across the lawn, reloaded the Thompson with an extra clip taped to its side. One of the men he'd shot was moaning and trying to raise himself from the ground as Randy came gallumphing across the grass at him. Kicking him in the head as he passed, Randy muttered, "Stick around, chum. I may want to talk to you later."

Still moving at a dead run, Randy vaulted the garden wall and came down gluggily in a muddy fishpond full of water lilies. Spotting a flash of pink in the distance, Randy struggled to his feet, poured the muddy water from the barrel of his gun, and jumped out of the fishpond. He ran at least three paces, eyes fixed on the distant pink flash, and fell into a swimming pool.

The deep end.

"She went thataway," A sleepy feminine voice said, as Randy, coughing chlorinated water, hooked an elbow and a waterlogged machine gun over the edge of the pool and started to pull himself up onto the sun-warmed terra-cotta deck around the pool.

The person who'd spoken was lounging in a redwood deck chair in a pair of sunglasses and the lower part of a very teenyweeny polkadot bikini. She was nonchalantly waving the top part toward where Randy had seen the pink flash and repeating, "She went thataway, pardner, if you're looking for that kooky dame in the pink dress. But she's not wearing it, any more."

Randy finished pulling himself out of the pool and gazed in the direction the girl in half a bikini was pointing with the other half. The Oriental beauty's pink Manadrin dress was hanging on a rose bush, its expensive satin badly torn by the thorns.

"I asked her why she didn't use the gate." The girl in the tweenyweeny polkadot bikini bottom sighed. "But she seemed to be in some kind of a hurry. Do you always chase girls with a machine gun, Mr. . . .?"

"Kidd—Randy Kidd. And you're Miss . . . ?"

"Mrs. Dammit. So let's not bother with names. I'm going to have enough trouble with the neighbors as it is, explaining why some nutty Chinese broad came busting out of my yard as naked as a jaybird while strange men ran all over my place waving machine guns."

"You're American, aren't you?" Randy smiled.

"Yeah, but my husband's Spanish, lover. So if you want to work something out for later, let's name the time and place, but let's put a *move* on it, huh?"

"The Casino Cabrones? Tomorrow night?"

"What's the matter with tonight? My husband's got to go to a yachting party, and—"

"Call me. Later," Randy said impatiently, as he headed toward the wall the Oriental girl had vanished over.

"You'll never catch her, handsome," the girl by the pool said. "She jumped into a sports car parked over the next street and cut out at ninety miles an hour."

Randy shrugged and, after filing away the information that, somewhere in Los Perros, a stark-naked Oriental chick was driving a cream-colored Jaguar, headed back the way he'd come. He managed to fall into neither the pool nor the fish pond this time.

The man he'd kicked was still alive, more or less. So Randy took him by the scruff of the neck and, holding the machine gun in one hand, dragged him across the grass to the car.

A motorcycle policeman, attracted to the scene by the noise or possibly a few frantic phone calls, was pulling up near Ahern's car. He stopped his engine, stared thoughtfully at the five still forms scattered about the scenery, and, noting that the tall *gringo* dragging the man across the lawn had a machine gun, asked if Randy knew anything about it.

"We're on 'Candid Camera,'" Randy explained in a low voice.

"*Como?*"

"'Candid Camera, *la televisión. Comprende?* But don't let on that you know, *amigo*. They won't pay us if we blow the bit!"

"Pay?" The policeman blinked. Then a look of low cunning spread over his features and he added, "Where is the camera hidden, señor?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Randy shrugged. "I just got here." He continued towards the car, dragging his victim, as a jeep full of Republican Guards pulled up beside the motorcycle policeman's machine.

The officer in charge got stiffly you, hand on holstered

pistol, and whispered, "What is happening here?" to the obviously conspiratorial cop.

"'Candid Camera,'" the cop muttered. "Don't turn around. I think I have spotted the camera. It is in that hibiscus bush. The one with the man hanging from the lower branches."

"We are on *la televisión? Now?*"

"*Sí.* Do not mug so, señor Lieutenant! The *gringo* tells me we will not be paid unless they use this bit."

"How pleased my mother will be!" the lieutenant simpered. "She always said I should go to Hollywood and try for to replace Gilbert Roland. What should we do about this *gringo?* Pretend to arrest him?"

"That would be most ordinary." The policeman shrugged. "I have seen the program, and they like to use scenes where nobody does what you would expect them to, *comprende?*"

"Ahah! I think I understand the bit!" The lieutenant nodded.

He walked over to the CIA man's car and, as Randy opened the door and threw the wounded Fang henchman into the back seat, started to wipe the windshield. The other soldiers, getting into the act, starting wiping the rest of the car with their handkerchiefs while the policeman, still playing to the hibiscus bush, started to do the Charleston.

Another jeepload of Republican Guards pulled up.

The captain riding beside the driver looked hopefully around and asked, "Revolution?"

"'Candid Camera,'" someone whispered. "Don't let on . . ."

As Randy Kidd drove away, the entire crew was playing leapfrog across the lawn, trying desperately not to stare at the hibiscus bush.

Chapter TEN

"It's psychosomatic," Doctor Crawllaway was saying as Captain Ahern recovered consciousness. The small, wizened medical examiner eyed his chief with ill-concealed distaste as Ahern, rubbing the side of his face, insisted, "It felt like *fire*, Doc! Like I'd been stung by a king-sized bee anyway."

"There's no swelling," Crawllaway insisted, "and nothing on the tip of the dart I pulled out of you. *Ipso facto*, it has to be psychosomatic."

"But Doc," Randy said, frowning, "why would this Doctor Fang go to all this trouble just to shoot *un*poisoned darts into us?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know." Crawllaway shrugged. "Why don't you ask him?"

"I'll ask this guy he sent after us instead," Randy growled, frowning down at the somewhat battered Fang henchman he'd brought, with Ahern, back to CIA Headquarters.

The man was a mestizo, or half Indian, about thirty. He was very thin and not feeling so hot. The .45- caliber machine-gun slug in his belly was playing hell with his digestion, and his breathing wasn't so hot either.

"If you want to question that one," Crawllaway sniffed, "you'd better get busy. Off hand, I give him about five minutes at the most."

"Have you anything that will bring him around, Doc?"

"Sure, but he'd live longer if we didn't use stimulants."

"How long?"

"Like I said, about five minutes."

"That's if we bring him to?"

"That's *it*, Mr. Kidd. You really shouldn't shoot people in the pancreas if you want to hold long conversations with them."

"I only want a short one, Doc. Can't you bring him around for a few seconds?"

"That's about all we can do." Crawllaway shrugged. "I'll see if I can find some adrenalin."

He puttered off into another room, muttering something about diaphragmic paralysis to himself as Ahern, propping himself up on one elbow, looked across at the man on the other couch and said, "Make him tell us what he shot me with, Kidd. The doc says there wasn't anything in that dart, but *he's* not the guy that has to worry about it!"

"Upsy-daisy, *amigo!*" Randy said, slapping the uncon-cious hood across the mouth.

He slapped him a couple more times before the man's eyelids fluttered and he mumbled, "Do not beat me, Doctor Fang! It was not *my* fault the accursed Americanos escaped our trap. I *told* Mistress Lei Mi it was too open a place for an ambush!"

"Did he say Lei Mi?" gasped Ahern.

"I think he meant it as a proper noun rather than a verb," Randy answered. "Seems to be the name of the chick in the pink dress, unless there was somebody else we didn't see. Somebody feminine enough to be called Mistress."

"I should have known that damned Lei Mi would be mixed up in this!" Ahern groaned, sitting up and swinging his legs down to the floor. He shook his head wearily and added, "We *knew* Lei Mi operated out of Hong Kong, and we knew Doctor Fang had escaped to Hong Kong, but somehow we never connected them up."

"How could you have?" Randy smiled thinly. "The CIA never guessed that Castro would have those jets the U.S. State Department gave him. How could they be expected to connect a Chinese archfiend named Fang and a Chinese . . . what the hell *is* Lei Mi?"

"That was a low blow, Kidd," Ahern protested. "You know damned well we gave Cuba those tanks and planes to use against the Commies. Is it our fault some

cheater used them against us during the Bay of Pigs operation?"

"Operation? Is *that* what you call a . . . never mind, let's get back to Lei Mi. Who is she, and what connection do you think she might have with Doctor Fang?"

"Lei Mi is a desperately beautiful mystery woman of the Orient," Ahern explained. "She's supposed to be the daughter of an English lord and a Chinese woman known as the Tigress of the China Seas. You've heard of *her*, of course."

"Queen of the Pirates?"

"And opium smugglers. Used to run opium into Canton and highjack gold shipments coming out of Macao. That sort of stuff."

"And Lei Mi is the daughter of this unholy union?"

"Who knows? Whoever her mother and father were, Lei Mi is a bitch on wheels! Last time we heard of her, she was mixed up in a dastardly plot to kidnap the Queen of England and hold her for ransom, demanding the crown jewels and custody of Prince Phillip and, at the same time, dickering with the head of an international vice lord for the sale of an unusual white slave."

"She sounds simply awful!" Randy gasped. "But what of her connection with Doctor Fang?"

"He's pretty awful too." Ahern shrugged. "Maybe it's just birds-of-a-feather time in Los Perros. Can't you slap that guy some more and see what he knows?"

"I could slap him some more," Randy replied, "But I don't think he'd be able to tell us much. Like, the guy's dead."

"This ought to bring him around." Doctor Crawllaway smiled, stepping through the doorway with a large hypodermic needle. Randy watched with interest while Crawllaway inserted the needle into the corpse's arm, pumped a vein full of straw-colored fluid, and waited to see what was going to happen.

The medical examiner seemed rather surprised when nothing did.

"He's dead, Doc," Ahern explained gently.

"Impossible!" Crawllaway snapped. "It hasn't been five minutes yet."

Randy Kidd didn't answer. While Doctor Crawllaway and Captain Ahern were watching the stiff, he'd managed to retrieve his P-38 from Ahern's desk. He ambled over to the door and opened it just as Ahern muttered, "Where are you going?"

"The john," Randy answered.

This wasn't exactly true, but since Ahern had fibbed about giving him back his gun, Randy felt no compunction about telling a little white lie.

Besides, it was nearly five, and he had a date that evening.

Chapter ELEVEN

The pad was a mess. There were bottles all over the floor, and somebody had burned a hole in the rug with a cigarette or possibly a flame thrower. A man's necktie was draped over the ceiling light fixture, and when Randy went into his bedroom, he found a naked woman draped over his bed. It was Baby Jane Dough. As far as he could tell, she was still alive.

Randy shrugged and continued on into the bathroom. He tossed the late Howard Hardiman's lavender shorts out the door and undressed. Then he turned on his shower. He'd just got it nice and comfy and stepped into the warm spray, when the bathroom door opened and Baby Jane Dough came in. She opened the shower curtain, said, "Hi," and got under the shower with Randy.

"You smell funny," she murmured, "but I need somebody to scrub my back."

"Sorry." Randy shrugged, thinking back to that long, long crawl through the mud of the Alley of the Butterflies. "You see, there were all these pigs and chickens and—"

"You smell like flowers," the redhead sighed. "A little further down and to the right, lover."

"Flowers?" Randy mused, sniffing. He could smell chlorine in the tapwater, a faint lemon smell from the German soap in his hand, and the freshly shampooed odor of Baby Jane's scalp a few inches from his nose. But that was absobloodylutely it.

He remembered something Hardiman had said the night before and asked, "Roses?"

"Yeah, that's just what it smells like. Roses. She leaned back against him and slithered her soapy back across his flesh in time as she sang, in a voice that was decidedly not that of a little girl, "Ring around the rosies, pocket full of posies . . . ashes, and ashes, and all fall *down!*"

"For crying out tears, Baby Jane," Randy gasped. "In the *shower?*"

"What's the matter with the shower?" She slithered. "You are squeaky clean, and I love you, whatever your name is."

A while later, Randy turned off the shower and asked, "Still smell roses?"

"Roses, schmoses, let's do it again," Baby Jane purred.

"Got to split, doll," Randy insisted, prying himself loose from Baby Jane's octopoid grip and drying himself as well as one can dry oneself with a soaking-wet nymphomaniac climbing one's frame.

It wasn't easy, but somehow Randy managed to dress and convince Baby Jane that it was indelicate for a young lady to follow a gentleman down a hotel corridor in the nude. While the redhead searched frantically for her clothes, Randy ducked out.

He dog-trotted down to Regina's suite, found the door open, and made it inside just as, down the hall, his own door opened and a feminine voice called, "Where are you, squeaky-clean loverboy? It's been five minutes since I had a man, and the frustration of it all is driving me out of my skull!"

"Up to your old tricks, Randy darling?" Regina asked.

The Blue Queen was seated on the couch in a blue satin dressing gown, reading. The couch was covered with sheets of paper covered with notes typed in the Cyrillic alphabet used in the Russian language. Regina cleared a place beside her and patted one of the cushions. "Sit down," she said. "This is very interesting."

"I'd better lock the door," Randy suggested. "There's a crazy dingaling looking for me. By the way, shouldn't *you* have thought of that? I mean, even if somebody working for the Kremlin gave you those papers, which I doubt, there's a matter of a frozen Hennesy in your fridge, no?"

"I have someone watching the door." Regina shrugged. "Knew you might be coming in in a hurry, so I left

instructions to allow you to open sesame. Anybody else gets shot."

"Oh?" Randy blinked, looking around the empty room.

"Across the hall, lover," Regina explained. "I have this nice young fellow from Israel watching my door with a high-powered rifle. He's watching through a hole in his own door, of course."

"Of course. Uh, what's this Israeli doing in the case?"

"Oh, everybody's looking for Doctor Fang, Randy lover. Now that I've read some of the stuff the Russians had on him, I can certainly see why. There's an Arab spy watching the elevator for me, too!"

"Okay. But what about the corpse in the icebox? The last I heard from the CIA, they wanted to come up and shake us down one more time, from the top."

"Don't worry about Hennesy. He's gone."

"Gone? What did he do, get up and walk away again?"

"I sold him." Regina yawned.

"Sold him?" Randy blinked. "Who in hell *to?*"

"The Mali Republic. They have a low-budget espionage apparatus, but the fellow who approached me was so cute, and I did need the refrigerator space, and—"

"Never mind. How much did you get? I may want to sell a body myself, and I'd like to know the going price in Los Perros."

"Oh, they didn't buy Hennesy because he was dead, Randy. They wanted to ship him back to Mali for an autopsy. He seems to have been killed by something unusual, for Doctor Fang."

"I know." Randy nodded. "He just died. He didn't, ah, love himself to death. That's the way most of Fang's victims have died, you know."

"I know." Regina nodded. "It's all here in these notes. Or I should say, the outline of Fang's fiendish plot to conquer the universe is in them. The Russians haven't figured out the details, but then, neither has Doctor Fang, I *hope!*"

"You know what it is that he's been dipping his darts

in?" Randy asked. "I just heard a real doozer of an argument on the subject, down at CIA Headquarters. According to Doc Crawllaway, our medicine man in Los Perros, there's no aphrodisiac known that would make people behave the way they've most obviously *been* behaving!"

"There *isn't* any *chemical* that would do the job," Regina said. "What that archfiend Fang has up his sinister sleeve is something more diabolical than anyone suspected."

"And?" Randy asked.

"And what?"

"Aw, come *on*, Regina. Are you going to milk the suspense to the last drop? You're not getting paid by the word, you know."

"Germs." Regina yawned.

"Germs?"

"Mutated plague germs. Doctor Fang, in working on bacteriological-warfare project for the Chinese Communists, stumbled over a new and deadly strain of plague germs."

"You mean, like the black plague?"

"Don't be so Sunday supplemental. I mean the plain old plague plague. There's only one kind, you know."

"I didn't, but go on."

"The plague has swept out of the Orient every few hundred years for as long as anyone can remember. The plague of 1349 wiped out two thirds of the population of the world."

"Nasty stuff, but that's ancient history, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Not if Doctor Fang has his way, Randy darling. Old Fangie-wangie, the creep, wants to write his *own* version of history!"

"Yipes! He wants to wipe out two-thirds of the world's population?"

"The world should be so lucky!" Regina sighed. "Remember that business about people having screwball blood, like you and me?"

"Type O, Diego factor positive," Randy repeated. "I've

had it pounded into me over and over again by Ahern and Doctor Crawllaway. Why?"

"There aren't many of us, you know," Regina answered. "Maybe fifteen percent of the Oriental or part-Oriental people in the world—and, you can bet your bird, Doctor Fang!"

"And Lei Mi!" added Randy.

Regina blinked, looked at her watch, and muttered, "At *this* hour?"

"Chinese mystery lady, like with darts," Randy soothed, adding, "but while we're on the subject . . ."

"*Down*, lover. Do you realize the inscrutable Oriental archvillian Doctor Fang is trying to wipe out just about the whole human race?"

"Yeah?" Randy yawned. "Well, it's gonna take him quite a while at the rate he's going. I mean, more babies are born every minute than Fang's managed to kill so far."

"He's killing babies, too?"

"Oh, you know what I mean, doll. They told me down at CIA Headquarters that good old fiendish Fang was popping folks off right and left with his kazoos. But like I said, you'd need a lot of poison darts to wipe the whole human race out."

"That's one of the problems Doctor Fang was working on when the Chicoms decided to kill him." Regina nodded. "It was sort of enlightened self-interest on their part, by the way. The Chicoms have always said they could lose a few million people and be none the worse for it. But Fang's new version of the old plague sobered them up in a hurry. Or maybe the clique running Red China these days just doesn't happen to share the Diego factor with the good doctor, my favorite accompanist, and yours truly?"

"Fifteen percent of type O . . ." mused Randy. "Say you have a little more than a third of the Chinese population with *any* kind of type O, and you have odds of less than five percent. Much worse than Russian roulette with all but one of the chambers loaded!"

"And the Russians, not being Mongoloids, have even hairier odds!" Regina marveled. "So you can see why both the Chicoms and the Russians turned thumbs down on Doctor Fang's plan to conquer the universe!"

"I sure can!" Randy muttered. Then his brows knit and he said, "I can? I mean, who says he's got to shoot his *own* people with his dirty darts from a blue kazoo?"

"Nobody, unless you count yourself, lover. I mean, it's like you said, Randy. You'd take forever wiping out the population of one major city if you had to inject the germs directly into the people. What do you know about the plague, lover?"

"That it ain't black?"

"Silly, it *is*, or at least, the old-fashioned kind Doctor Fang started out with was. Victims of the plague turn all sorts of colors, but they mostly wind up purple or black and blotchy by the time it's over. That was why they gave it the nickname of black plague. But forget the old-fashioned stuff, Randy, except to remember how it was spread! Do you know how the people who died in 1349 caught the plague?"

"Fang shot them with a kazoo?"

"Not exactly. They were bitten by fleas. The plague was carried across the world in the blood of infected ship's rats, and when the rats died, the fleas had no place to go. So they jumped on people and started to nibble. Naturally, they'd been nibbling on infected rats, so they transmitted the plague to the poor, unsuspecting people!"

"Where," asked Randy, "did they go after the *people* died?"

"Noplace. *They* died, too."

"From the plague?"

"What else?"

"Did they swell up and turn black?"

"The rats or the people?"

"The *fleas*, dammit!"

The Blue Queen blinked a couple of times, consulted her notes, and muttered, "It doesn't say. Anyway, it's not

important. Doctor Fang's version of plague is not spread by rat fleas."

"Because he'd rather do it himself, with the blue kazoo?"

"No. Because rat fleas are immune to the particular strain the good doctor isolated."

"I know!" Randy brightened. "They have type-O blood, Diego factor positive! Do you suppose they have Cherokee grandmothers?"

"Maybe. It's not important. You see, there was one other way to transmit old-fashioned plague, Randy. Under proper conditions the plague takes a form known as pneumonic plague and can spread through the air like the common cold."

"Oh, *icky!*"

"Icky is right. The great plague of London, in 1660, was spread partly in the pneumonic form. If they hadn't burned the city down, by accident, *everybody* might have died."

"Let me see if I get the picture." Randy frowned. "You can catch old-fashioned plague by having the germs injected under your skin, via flea or kazoo dart, or if you're *real* lucky, you can breath in some airborne bugs and turn all sorts of colors?"

"That's not very scientific, but it's accurate, lover."

"And Fang's new stain of plague, although it can't hitchhike from one victim to another on an infected flea, can travel around on a kazoo dart or . . . yipes!"

"Yipes is what the Chicoms thought." Regina nodded. "Doctor Fang's idea was to develop a pneumonic form of his new and deadly version of the already pretty deadly plague, send it up in rockets or balloons, turn it loose in the upper atmosphere, and let it drift around the world in the prevailing winds. In a year or so, Fang and those few Mongoloids still alive would own the world."

"But there wouldn't *be* that many of *anybody!*" Randy protested.

"That's what they said in Peking. According to Fang's

math, though, the headstart China's vast population would give her would mean that there'd still be several million Chicoms left, even after the inevitable riots, fires, and famines that followed the wholesale death of most of her population. So from Fang's point of view, The Sons of Han would inherit the earth."

"What was left of it." Randy frowned. "Who, by the way, are these Sons of Hannah?"

"Han. That's what the Chinese call themselves in private. The few million Sons of Han, once the plague had died down, would find the world populated by themselves, a handful of other Orientals that the more numerous Chinese could easily dominate or absorb, and scattered handfuls of Hawaiian pineapple pickers with nobody to pick pineapples for, American Indians here and there looking for cowboys in vain, and, I suppose, a teeny-weeny number of predominantly Caucasian or Negroid folks with some Oriental or Amerind blood in their veins. But even if the Indians made us members of the tribe, there wouldn't be enough of us, all together, to stave off a Chinese conquest of the world. And, Randy lover, guess who'd be leading China as she took over?"

"Our pal with the blue kazoo?"

"Who else? By the way, have you figured out by now *why* it was a blue kazoo?"

"What's to figure? Every kazoo has to be *some* color."

Regina shook her blond head sadly and sighed as she contemplated her sidekick. "I've just *told* you, darling, that we are immune to Fang's plague. Or at least, *I* am. Since reading these reports I, ah, borrowed from the Russians, I'm not so sure about *you*."

"Egad! You think I've got it?"

"I think it would be impossible, in your case, to tell. I told you, didn't I, what the effects of Fang's fiendish, fantastic fulminations have on the human organism?"

"No, you were telling me why he paints his kazoos blue."

"Oh, that was for us. I *am* supposed to be the Blue Queen, you know. Fang knew he couldn't kill us with his

usual goodies, so he had his assassins armed with *poisoned* darts when they came after us. The kazoos were color coded."

"Wait a minute!" Randy gasped. "I just remembered something! The kazoo that Lei Mi shot me with wasn't blue. It was, lemme see . . . purple!"

"That means we have two colors in the code." Regina smiled. "Blue kazoos contain a quick-acting nerve poison in their magazines. Purple kazoos are loaded with anesthesia-dipped darts, and . . . what color were the kazoos they were using when they ambushed you and Ahern, Randy?"

"Who was looking?" Randy snorted. Then he thought back and frowned. "Seems they were sort of blackish. But they didn't have anything on their darts."

"Oh, come on!"

"No, seriously, Doctor Crawllaway ran all sorts of tests on the dart that hit Ahern. Said it was clean as a whistle."

"That doesn't make sense," Regina mused. "Why go to all that trouble just to shoot a perfectly harmless dart into somebody?"

"Maybe they were just stalling us?"

"Doctor Fang threw away all those men just to slow you down?"

"Why not? He's supposed to be a fiend, you know."

"But a smart one, lover. If he had a reason for stalling you it's not apparent. And as long as he was shooting Ahern, why not shoot him for real? It's rather odd that Doctor Fang should suddenly get so tenderhearted toward *our* side! Do you suppose that *Ahern* . . . ?"

"Nah, he's too much of a jerk to be working for anybody but our State Department. Besides, if Ahern was in cahoots with Fang, he could have killed me when I came staggering in on him half out of my skull. I mean, I was armed and sort of frantic, and mistakes do happen with a Colt Cobra."

"Shooting you would have been a bit crude."

"Okay. So even if the CIA should suddenly decide to

do things smooth for a change, why set up that bush-league ambush? And why didn't Ahern roll up the window on his side, and why couldn't he have got Doctor Crawllaway to lie and say he *had* been shot with something icky and—"

"Never mind," Regina cut in dryly. "I'm willing to drop our friend Captain Ahern for now. How about this Crawllaway?"

"How about him?" Randy shrugged. "He strikes me as another jerk. For one thing, everybody from the Mali Republic to the Arab League seems to know about Fang's bugs but Crawllaway. *He* thinks Fang's using some sort of aphrodisiac."

"You mean, our State Department's floundering around in a state of complete confusion?" Regina blinked. Then, before her sidekick could answer, she shrugged her ivory shoulders and muttered, "Figures."

"What about this Igor Igorovitch Sonofapitch?" Randy asked.

"He's cute," Regina answered, "but you know I never discuss my, ah, dates."

"I mean," Randy answered murderously, "what about him as a bad guy? You could have been had, you know! Those papers could have been *planted* to throw us off the scent!"

"Ahead of time?" Regina mused. "I doubt it. Not many spy ladies walk in off the street and ask to see the Soviet intelligence officer. Besides, the bullets they fired at me were real. More real than those poison darts they fired into . . . Randy! You don't suppose our Doctor Crawllaway is even more incompetent than most of the people our government hires, do you?"

"I don't see how he *could* be. Why?"

"If what you say is true, about our medical men not knowing the full extent of Fang's foul fiendishness, our friend Captain Ahern could be in big trouble. When you left him, Randy, was he acting any different?"

"No, just jerky, as always."

"Did he mention any funny smells?"

"Funny smells? No. Why do you ask?"

"That's one of the symptoms," Regina explained. She dug through the Russian notes until she found the place she was looking for and read, " 'As in the original strain of plague, the victim experiences olfactory hallucinations, although not, in the case of Fang's new strain, the familiar plague token of a white ring around a flushed area. No visible tokens, in fact, appear to accompany the Aphroditic Plague.' "

"Fine." Randy smiled. "Now read it in English!"

"Plague tokens are what they used to call the first symptoms. The victim broke out in rosy red spots with bloodless white rings between the inflamed and the healthy flesh. Later, the red spots turned black and swelled, but by then, not too many people were around. Especially if the plague victims were dumb enough to say they smelled flowers."

Randy's jaw dropped as quite suddenly he remembered something he'd heard a few minutes before. "Ring around the rosies!" he swore.

"Why, Randy lover, you *do* read," Regina marveled. "Not many people remember any more that the old poem 'Ring around the Rosies' was originally made up to enable folks to remember the classic plague tokens. Ring around the rosies refers to the white ring around the inflamed plague spots, the pocket full of posies is the imaginary flowers the victim smells, and the ashes and ashes used to be *achoos* and *achoos*. They sneezed a lot. All fall down is sort of self explanitory, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Baby Jane Dough's got it!" Randy gasped.

"The plague or the purple kazoo?"

"Zounds! I forgot all about her kazoo!"

"You saw her recently?"

"All of her. But she didn't have the kazoo. At least, not on her, and that theory I had where she might have hidden it is something we may as well forget."

"Never mind the gory details," Regina snapped, getting to her feet. "Where is she right now?"

"In my pad. Is there anything we can do for her?"

"If I know you, lover, you've done as much as you can."

"I mean, to cure her!"

"There isn't any cure for Aphroditic Plague, unless . . . I wonder if they've tried opium!"

"Let's find her first," Randy answered. "We can worry about the cure after we find the victim."

"I'll come with you," Regina suddenly decided, reaching for the pistol she carried in a tiny holster strapped to the inside of her left thigh. "If we can't help Baby Jane, we can always sell her to the Mali Republic. And there's the matter of the purple kazoo she carries around in her purse!"

Needless to say, Baby Jane Dough was not in Randy's pad when they got there. Neither was the kazoo, purple or any other color. They searched high and they searched low. They found pennies in the cushions of the couch, belly button floss in the backs of dresser drawers, and a Gideon Bible printed in Swahili, left over from a 1954 Mau Mau convention. But they did not find the kazoo or any of the darts from it.

"Oh well," Randy sighed, pouring himself a stiff drink from a miraculously intact bottle of Pimm's #2, "tell me about the opium cure, George."

"It was rabbits, if my name is George," Regina answered. "I'll have one of those too, while you're at it. And I didn't say opium would cure Aphroditic Plague. I just said it might. You see, there's a chance that Fang's fiendish bugs aren't new at all. Just a sort of rare form of regular plague. It comes in several varieties as it is, and some pretty sexy things took place during the great plague and fire of 1660 to 65. Most of the victims just swelled up, turned awful, and died, but some of them acted pretty raunchy first. There are some incredible stories of wild orgies held in the streets of London just before the fire. Mass rapes, necrophilia, lycanthropy—"

"Hold it!" Randy objected. "Lycanthropy's that jazz where a cat thinks he's a wolf, isn't it?"

"That's one form the insanity takes. But the stories have

been cleaned up by prudish historians. It's true that the classic werewolf kills and devours or partially devours his victims, most of whom are children or young girls. But the sadistic madman suffering from lycanthropic delusions usually does a few other things before killing them and—"

"I get the picture. Then if this—Aphroditic Plague?—of Doctor Fang's works anything like the sexier form of plain old-fashioned black plague, we can count on all sorts of fun and games?"

"Not unless it mutates again," Regina said, "but the pure aphroditic strain could cause enough excitement. No doubt before everyone dies, we'll be treated to all sorts of psychotic sexual misbehavior. So far, most of the victims seem to have been more or less 'normal,' but can you imagine what would happen if Fang's germs hit the central nervous system of some kook like Jack the Ripper? To say nothing of the countless pederasts, fellators, analists, and child molesters hanging around any big city!"

"Be interesting to watch Columbus Circle, from a distance." Randy grimaced. "But you were going to tell me about opium."

"It's just something I read." Regina shrugged. "You see, the bugs Fang isolated may have been around in a milder form, mixed in with ordinary plague all these years. I told you that there were incredible orgies accompanying the great plagues that swept Europe. Some historians attribute them to an eat-drink-and-be-merry philosophy, but no matter how merry or even boiled a normal person gets, there's a limit to how much hell he can raise!"

"But people with the plague went further?"

"Did they ever! Chinese legend would have it that the Emperor Shih Huang Ti, the cat who built the Great Wall, made love to twelve hundred young girls in a row. Wherepon he became a saint in paradise."

"Because he made so many girls happy?"

"Because it killed him! Or maybe because the plague killed him. Plague is endemic in the Orient, you know, and it's possible the Emperor had it in the Aphroditic form."

"There sure was *something* going for him," Randy marveled. "I mean . . . *twelve hundred?*"

"The Great Wall was built to keep the Huns out of China," Regina continued, "but apparently it didn't keep the plague out of the Huns. Attila the Hun swept across Europe in the last days of the Roman Empire, and as you may recall, the Huns were pretty sexy."

"I don't recall, but I'll take your word for it."

"The Huns swept as far as Cologne, where they raped Saint Ursula and the other nuns in her convent. They, ah, kept at it until the girls were dead. Attila himself died in bed, with a blond. Of nervous and physical exhaustion. But then, Attila the Hun was also a *dwarf*, so—"

"So that's where the story comes from!"

"What story?"

"Acres and acres of it, and it's all mine! I mean, how fat was this blond of Atilla the Midget?"

"Hun. And they don't say. Seems the Huns killed her for, ah, loving their leader not wisely but too well."

"How about Catherine the great?" Randy asked. "Did she have Aphroditic Plague too? I mean, I heard this story about her and this horse and . . ."

"The Czarina, Catherine II, was just a plain old nympho," Regina sniffed. "But there *is* a story about the Emperor Yang Wang, a famous fornicator of the Sui Dynasty, and that's where the opium comes in—if Wang had Fang's ants in his pants, I mean. He certainly had *something* wrong down there."

"He made love to *twenty-four* hundred girls and became a saint in paradise?" asked Randy eagerly.

"No. He lived. But he was able, according to the Chinese records, to cut down on his sex through the use of opium. Opium has a dulling effect on hunger, digestion, and, ah, other bodily functions, you know. So when the Emperor Wang started to wear his . . . himself out, the Chinese medics prescribed opium."

"And it worked?"

"Sort of. Yang Wang was able to cut down to twenty women a day, or perhaps I should say night. The Chinese

records are vague on what time Yang Wang went to bed. Or, for that matter, if he ever got out."

"Twenty?" Randy mused. "Maybe once or twice after a couple of years in jail, but . . . every day? He *musta* been sick!"

"That's why we've got to get our hands on Baby Jane Dough, or at least some other plague victim, before they die! If opium can cure, or at least enable the victims to survive, we may win out over the fiendish Fang's foul fulminations yet!"

"But Regina," Randy objected, "if what you're saying is true, then the whole world will have to start taking dope and making love twenty times a day and— What am *I* complaining about? Let's go!"

They went.

Back to Regina's pad, at any rate, since there didn't seem to be anywhere else to go. To Rigina's surprise, however, the door to her suite was wide-open.

"That's funny," she mused, eyeing the door across the hall. It was open a little bit too. She walked over to it, knocked, and whispered, "David? You there, you li'l ol' Sabra, you?"

Nobody answered. Regina, raising her pistol, pushed the door open. The apartment was empty. Well, not completely empty. Aside from the furniture, there were a half-empty bottle of Manischewitz Kosher Cherry, a clip of Weatherby Magnum rifle ammunition, and a pair of jockey shorts. All three were lying on the rug near the open door.

"How curious," Regina muttered.

Across the hall, in her own pad, things got curiouser and curiouser. The Russian notes were gone, for one thing. Regina looked at the pristine emptiness of her couch and swore daintily in several esoteric languages. "David *promised*," she bitched, "to keep an eye on my door for me!"

"Maybe he's the cat who swiped the notes you swiped," Randy answered, picking up a filmy feminine undergarment and adding, "This happen to be yours, doll?"

"Of course not!" Regina snapped, scornfully eyeing the thing Randy had picked up.

"Thought you wore a larger size." Randy grinned. "By the way, did I ever tell you what a zebra was?"

"A zebra? What in the world has a zebra got to do with this case, you idiot?"

"Tell me what is a zebra, and I'll tell you what it has to do with this case."

"Oh, I'll bite. A zebra is a black horse with white stripes, right?"

"Wrong."

"A white horse with black stripes?"

"Wrong again."

"Okay, I give up. What's a zebra?"

"A zebra is twenty-five sizes bigger than an A bra."

"Sometimes," Regina sighed, "you can be pretty childish. You know that?"

"I know the chick who wore this bra was a well-developed young lady. Though not as well developed as some people I know. *Ipso facto*, there's been another chick in this place. Like, recently. This bra wasn't on the floor last time I was here."

"Baby Jane Dough?"

"Too large for her."

"You're sure?"

"I'm positive."

"Then who . . . ?" Regina mused. Then she snapped her fingers and gasped, "Fatima! I should have known!"

"Sure you should have." Randy nodded. "Who, by the way, is Fatima?"

"Remember me telling you there was a spy from the Arab League watching the elevators for me?"

"Yeah, but I assumed it was a male Arab, if there is such a thing."

"That's what I wanted you to think. I didn't want Fatima to be distracted from her task of guarding the elevator and— Let's go!"

Together, they ran down the corridor toward the elevators. Just at the elbow of the hallway, whence a

keen-eyed keyholer could keep a close scrutiny of what was going on in both directions, was the pad of Fatima al-Mut'ah, daughter of Islam and Miss Wadi-el-Aicair for 1964. The door was ajar.

"The door is ajar!" Regina marveled.

"It is also sort of open." Randy nodded.

Drawing his trusty P-38, Randy kicked the door open the rest of the way and sailed in, ready for anything.

Anything, that is, but what he found.

"Accursed Israeli onanist!" Fatima was murmuring dreamliy. "I hate you! I despise you! I loathe you! Do it again!"

"Arabian harlot!" David ben Schikza growled, biting Fatima on her neck. "I would rather make love to a *pig* than a goddamn Arab! But since there do not happen to be any pigs in this bed—"

"Excuse me," Randy cut in, "but do either of you smell, ah, *roses*?"

"Did you hear something, my wonderfully virile enemy?" Fatima sighed.

"Some *goyischakopf* asking about roses already," David ben Schikza murmured, chewing on her ear.

Fatima opened her eyes, looked Randy over, and sighed, "Mmmmm, you'll have to wait your turn, handsome infidel, but stick around!"

"About those roses . . ." Regina cut in.

"You'll have to wait *your* turn too, daughter of the Yankee imperialists. Although normally, I don't go in for that sort of—"

"Do you smell anything like perfume or flowers, dammit?" Regina snapped. "It's *important*, Fatima!"

"Important, schmortant," David ben Schikza murmured, gnawing on Fatima's collarbone. "Take your *ferschloggen* roses and split. Also remembering, please, to close the door."

"You *do* smell roses, then?"

"*Certainly* I am smelling roses." Ben Schikza shrugged, not losing rhythm as he asked, "Dolling, don't *you* smell roses?"

"I supposes," Fatima sighed, raking his back with her nails.

"Frankly, I thought you Israeli smelled like . . . Never mind. My father, the Sheik of Wadi-el-Aicair, is anti-Semitic."

"Randy!" gasped Regina. "Do you know what this means?"

"That the Sheik of Wadi-el-Aicair doesn't like Jews?"

"*No!* It means . . . it means that Doctor Fang has struck again!"

"Oh, I don't know," mused Randy, gazing admiringly at a display of bedroom athletics he'd never imagined possible. "Maybe they just *like* each other."

Chapter TWELVE

The sun was slithering slowly into the silvery sea when Randy emerged, breathless from his seventeen-block dog-trot, onto the terrace of the Casino Cabrones. Regaining his breath, if not his health, in several groaning gasps, he swiveled his eyes like gun barrels over the crowded terrace, looking for Cynthia/Felicidad.

The British agent had told him that under her wig and mustache she was blond, but she hadn't said what color blond or what style she wore her real hair in. Most of the women on the terrace were blond. Or at any rate, they had various shades of pastel hair, teased and sprayed into a semblance of cotton candy that ran the gamut from Las Vegas mint to fluorescent strawberry.

Most, however, could be eliminated at once by reason of age, weight, varicose veins, sclerotic figures, and other uncalled-for cards dealt by the fickle finger of fate. Randy had narrowed it down to a willowy type in pink capris and a bouffant pile of cholesterol-yellow hair, and Carnaby Street nymphet with fluorescent-lemonade hair that had apparently been freshly ironed in a steam press, when behind him a soft feminine voice said, "Sorry I'm late. Had to see about my partner. Dead, you know."

Randy turned to face a third blond clad in a severe tweed suit of bull-dyke brown. The hair was as severe as the suit, although of a much lighter shade, and the eyes, sans brown contact lenses, were cardboard gray. Randy, being a gentleman of a sort, repressed a shudder and instead of saying, "Glug," asked, "Cynthia?"

"Of Her Majesty's Service," Cynthia/Felicidad answered with a slight bow of her head. "You wouldn't by any chance know where I could dispose of a body, would you?"

"I hear the Mali Republic's in the market," Randy answered. "Anyone I know?"

"Chap named Chumly. Decent sort, really. He failed to report in this evening, and when I went to look for him, I found he'd been done in."

"Oh? Bullet or poison dart?"

"Hard to say. Haven't peeled his bark off. Oh, teddibly sorry; I should have told you before that Chumly was a palm tree. That is, he was *disguised* as a palm tree. We British agents do so throw ourselves into our parts that even I had begun to take poor Chumly at face value. Or perhaps I should say trunk value. Palm trees don't *have* faces, you know."

"I know. Used to work with a maple by the name of Abercromby. This partner of yours—he didn't complain of the smell of, ah, roses, did he?"

"No, but the soy sauce got to him after a bit. He was stationed just outside a certain Chinese restaurant, and—"

"Never mind where he *was*, where is he *now*?"

"Same place, eck-chooley. Inside his palm-tree suit, of course. But we can't just *leave* him there!"

"Why not?"

"I *beg* your pardon?"

"Why not leave him inside the tree? I mean, where in Los Perros is there a *better* place to hide a dead body?"

Cynthia/Felicidad thought about that for a moment and then, brightening somewhat, said, "I do think you're right, you know. Shall we have a spot of tea?"

"If you want to chance it." Randy shrugged. "But it's only fair to warn you, the tea they serve here is made with, ah, tea bags!"

"How *ghastly*!" Cynthia/Felicidad shuddered. "I didn't think that awful, if you'll pardon the expression, American barbarism had spread this far south!"

"I have some tea at my place." Randy smiled suavely.

"*Your* place?" Really, I couldn't!"

"It's orange pekoe," he insisted.

"Well, if you'll promise to be . . . good?"

"I'm always good," Randy promised, not adding that those ladies of his previous acquaintance who'd pro-

nounced his activities good had not been sitting in judgment on his propriety.

An hour later, however, he was beginning to think that the frigid-looking English spy had meant what she said about being good. She had drunk twelve cups of tea so far, and as of the moment, Randy hadn't even managed to talk her into taking off her jacket.

"I just don't dig you, doll." Randy frowned, pouring himself something a bit more unsubtle in its effects than tea as he added, "I mean, when I first met you, you were working as a . . . I mean, that *was* the kind of place I thought it was, wasn't it?"

"Of course. But that was different. I was on *duty!*"

"You mean"—Randy blinked—"you really did, ah, take care of that customer after talking to me?"

"But of course. I told you, Randy, that we British Agents throw ourselves wholeheartedly into our covers."

"Well, how about throwing yourself wholeheartedly out of that scratchy tweed suit and into something more, ah, romantic? Like, say, a couple of sheets I know about."

"You Yanks are so crude," Cynthia/Felocidad sniffed. "You should have guessed by now that I'm not that sort of girl."

"But you just said that on duty, you're perfectly willing to, ah, make love to any guy who comes down the Alley of the Butterflies with a couple of pesos in his hand!"

"Four hundred pesos, to be exact. Prices have risen lately."

"Are you trying to say," Randy asked suspiciously, "that you want me to offer you . . . ?"

"Don't be so *beastly!*" Cynthia/Felicidad snapped. Then, without warning, she started to cry.

"What the hell did I say?" Randy asked, guiltily, since he knew very well what he'd said.

"You implied that I . . . that I'm a common *tart!*" Cynthia Felicidad sobbed.

"Well, aren't you? On duty, I mean?"

"Of course I am, on *duty*. But off duty, I'm a nice girl!"

"That sounds reasonable," Randy muttered, putting his arm around her.

Cynthia/Felicidad pulled away and snapped, "Don't touch me!"

"Aw, for crying out tears, kid. It's not as if you were a bashful virgin, you know."

"But I *am!*" Cynthia/Felicidad wailed. "No man has ever . . . you know, while I was off duty."

"This dame," sighed Randy Kidd to nobody in particular, "is a real way-out dingaling of the first water!"

"Only socially," Cynthia/Felicidad sniffed.

"Yeah, but look at it this way, honey. Why did you keep our date tonight?"

"Because you asked me."

"Think again. You came to me to ask for my help in disposing of Chumly's trunk—I mean, corpse—didn't you?"

"Well, partly. But I did think you were ever so smashing."

"Ah, but you knew, or suspected, that I was an American spy, didn't you?"

"Oh, certainly. If you'll recall, it was I who warned you that there were two or three people following you down the alley."

"Roger dodger. And if *you'll* recall your spy novels, lady spies are perfectly willing to seduce boy spies, in the interests of their country."

"I hadn't thought of it that way!" Cynthia/Felicidad gasped, unbuttoning her tweed jacket. Then, frowning slightly, she asked, "But Randy darling, *why* are we seducing one another?"

"Just seduce me," Randy whispered, flicking off the light. "We'll think of a good reason later."

"Are they *still* at it?" Randy Kidd marveled, standing with Cynthia/Felicidad Forsyth and Doctor Crawllaway in the corridor of the clinic at CIA Headquarters.

"Still at what?" Crawllaway asked, sniffing delicately.

"Oh, let's not be coy, Doc." Randy grinned. "You know what condition Fatima and ben Schikza were in when you guys came for them. And Miss Forsyth, here, is a woman of the world."

"Only when I'm on duty," Cynthia/Felicidad sniffed. Her sniff, Randy noticed, was even sniffier than Doctor Crawllaway's. As if there were not enough delicate sniffers in the corridor, Regina and Captain Ahern came out of the soundproof room, allowing a burst of grunts, groans, and obscene lip-smacking noises to escape momentarily through the open door. Ahern, red faced, shut the door after him, but not in time to prevent an unbelievably obscene request from wafting forth and reddening the delicate ears of Cynthia/Felicidad. Regina, cool and poised as she was, caught her breath and dropped her eyes while Randy, blinking rapidly, muttered, "I thought I'd heard *everything*, but—"

"You realize," Doctor Crawllaway cut in, "that they are both doomed? That much activity without a moment's rest will build up such an oxygen debt that even should their cardiovascular systems withstand the strain, anoxia alone will destroy what's left of their brain tissues!"

"The opium doesn't help, then?" Regina asked.

"It helps a lot." Crawllaway shrugged. "They wouldn't have lasted this long if we hadn't been able to slow them down a bit. But suffering snakes! Do you have any idea how *much* opium I had to pump into them just to get their pulse rates down to normal?"

"A lot, I imagine." Regina smiled.

"A lot?" Crawllaway snapped. "I had to blow my whole year's supply on the girl alone!" He nodded at Cynthia/Felicidad and added, "If British Intelligence hadn't cooperated by donating *their* entire supply, the Israeli would be dead by now. As it is, ben Schikza has enough opium in him to put an elephant in a catatonic trance, and he's *still* averaging four climaxes an hour!"

"Least we could do," Cynthia/Felicidad said simply. "After all, you Yanks were jolly decent about poor

Chumly. I should *never* have thought of renting a chain saw!"

"Did you ever find out what killed him, Doc?" Ahern asked.

"Bullet," Crawllaway answered. "Russian-made seven-millimeter Red Army rifle bullet. Apparently the Soviet Embassy got wise to the fact that the palm tree in front of the Chinese restaurant was a British spy."

"How ghastly!" Cynthia/Felicidad gasped. "I *told* poor Chumly he'd do himself in by taking those afternoon tea breaks, but—"

"One thing I find a bit confusing, Doctor darlin'," Regina interrupted. "You say that between the CIA and the local branch of British Intelligence there was only enough opium to slow down one pair of Aphroditic Plague victims?"

"I did. After all, how much opium do you think we *use* in a year, Miss Regina?"

"Oodles?"

"Less than oodles. Less than oodles indeed. Mostly for stopping the digestive system. Opium is still administered, for instance, during operations on the intestines, but as you can imagine, we do very little of that sort of thing here at CIA Headquarters."

"How about pain killing?" Randy asked.

"Morphine's better," Crawllaway sniffed, "and even though morphine, like heroin, is derived from opium, *neither* seems to have any effect on the, ah, desires of the so-called plague victims."

"Okay. What do you need *any* opium for?" Randy insisted.

"Occasionally," the medical examiner said delicately, "our agents get shot in the guts."

"Never mind *why* you have opium, Doctor darlin'," Regina cut in. "What I'd like to know is, can you *cure* the Aphroditic Plague if you have *enough* opium?"

"There isn't that much opium." Crawllaway smiled, grimly. "And I am still far from convinced that this so-called plague of yours really exists!"

"Aw, come *on*, Doc!" Randy snorted. "What do you think *is* wrong with those two? And what do you think killed Hardiman and all the others?"

"Anoxia and general debility resulting from too much, ah, activity." Crawllaway shrugged.

"I still say it's Spanish fly," Ahern growled.

"But according to the files I, ah, borrowed from the Soviet Embassy–" Regina began, But Crawllaway and Ahern, exchanging meaningful glances, both shushed her at once.

"Did I say something wrong?" Regina frowned.

"You quoted Communist sources," Ahern explained. "Don't you know that according to State Department Regulation Number Nine Seven J, *everything* the Russians say is a *lie?*"

Regina, Randy, and Cynthia/Felicidad exchanged glances, and then Regina said, "But, Captain darlin', the Russians are looking for Doctor Fang too!"

"Ah!" Doctor Crawllaway exclaimed. "But how do we know it's the *same* Doctor Fang? And even if the Doctor Fang who's been killing Soviet agents is the same Doctor Fang who's been killing British and American agents, how do we know the Russians are really out to kill him?"

"I hardly imagine," Cynthia/Felicidad said dryly, "that they're looking for him to hang the Order of Hero of the Soviet Union on him!"

"No," Agreed Ahern, "but they could be trying to get him to work for them, instead of the Chicoms. Them Reds are pretty sneaky, you know. And subversive, too!"

"Why in the world," Regina sighed, tapping her foot in annoyance on the battleship linoleum floor, "would the Russians *want* to help Fang develop his diabolical death-dealing devices, Captain honey? I mean, if it was too scary for the Chicoms to use, and they're the only one's who *can* hope to survive, sort of, why would the Russians want it? Like, it would kill just about every little old Russian in the world if Fang's bugs went airborne!"

"Who," sniffed Crawllaway, "says so?"

"Why, those notes I stole from the Soviet . . ." began

Regina. And then her voice dropped off as she thought, very hard, about that frantic scene in Sonofapitch's office.

"You see?" cackled Crawllaway. "We have no proof, no proof at all, that this Doctor Fang has developed any such thing as a new Aphroditic version of the common plague!"

"But," asked Randy, "what if there *is* such a germ, Doc?"

"Until I see one," Crawllaway sniffed, "I do not intend to waste my cerebral powers on . . . on Soviet propaganda!"

"Okay," Randy persisted, "but meanwhile, those two victims of the vicious villian Fang are, ah, wearing themselves out. If they're not suffering from Aphroditic Plague, what *are* they suffering from?"

"Spanish fly," Ahern growled.

"Cantharides, or, to be vulgar, Spanish fly, does not work that way," Doctor Crawllaway sighed, patiently.

"Okay, Doc," asked Randy, "what does?"

"I don't know." Crawllaway shrugged. "Some unknown substance affecting the central nervous system and causing olfactory hallucinations and an intense desire for—"

"Hold it!" Randy cut in. "Isn't the smell of flowers one of the classic symptoms of black plague?"

"It is," Crawllaway simpered, "but they do not have black plague. We could *cure* them if they had that!"

"You could?"

"Certainly. Terramycine is the specific for common, or black, plague. Needless to say, when I first heard your ridiculous story I administered massive doses of the same to both, ah, victims. As you can see, they're still at it."

"Wouldn't it be more, ah, *proper*," asked Cynthia/Felicidad, "to *separate* them while you search for a cure?"

"With what, a crowbar?" sighed Crawllaway. "And if we *were* able to, ah, part them, we'd have a pair of frustrated onanists on our hands. Their hands, too, unless we tied them up."

"Only one onanist, Doctor honey," Regina, who read a lot, corrected him. "*Girls* who do things like that are *tamarists*."

"I didn't know." Crawllaway shrugged. "At any rate, we may as well leave them as they are. They're happier that way, and it's doing a lot for Israeli-Arab relations."

"Improving them or making them worse?" Regina mused, adding, "Never mind about all that, Doctor honey. What are you going to do about finding a cure for the . . . Oh, have it your way. What are you going to do for finding a cure for *whatever's* wrong with them?"

"If we had a few tons of opium . . ." Crawllaway began.

"*Tons!*" Regina gasped. "Do they need *that* much opium?"

"No, only a few pounds each." Crawllaway shrugged. "But there's no telling how long this condition will last or"—and here his voice grew pregnant with sinister implications as his listeners listened with baited breath—"How many *others* will fall afoul the fiendish Fang's fornicating *flétchettes!*"

"*Flétchettes?*" Randy blinked.

"Darts." Crawllaway shrugged. "But I'm stoked on alliterations."

Chapter THIRTEEN

Los Perros, sin capital of Central America, had a reputation among the jet-set swingers, international ins, high-rolling hippies, and other kooks, of being a town where, for a price, a man could buy anything from a Win with Wilkie button to a certified fourteen-year-old virgin, color optional. But Randy Kidd wasn't looking for a WIN WITH WILKIE button or even, at the moment, a nubile nymphet. He was trying, without much luck, to buy a few kilos of raw opium.

"You some kind of a nut?" (freely translated from the Spanish) was the usual answer Randy received in the fly shops, bordellos, and other places of business he visited in a weary attempt to make Los Perros live up to its reputation.

"Money is no object," he explained to a gaunt-looking hippy in one of those striped polo shirts and solid Hollywood collars plus a pair of those Italian sunglasses which look like the mask the Phantom wears in that comic strip.

The hippy looked at him without interest—or at any rate, without any interest that Randy could make out through the Phantom-mask sunglasses. (It was just past midnight, but the neon glare from an overhead sign was almost bright enough to read by.) And then, as Randy waited for an answer, the hippy opened his mouth, exposing a row of thumbnail-textured and -colored teeth, and laughed.

"For why you laugh at this stupid *gringo*, Paco?" a passing acquaintance asked, from behind his own Phantom-mask sunglasses and a vapid toothpick-in-one-corner-of-the-mouth smile.

"For because he is asking for Big O," laughed the hippy in the Hollywood polo shirt.

The other hippy, who was wearing skin-tight sailor

pants, powder-blue cowboy boots, and a shirt made out of old Norwegian fishing nets, laughed scornfully and asked, "*Hombre!* Do you know that O is *square?*"

"I thought," Randy answered mildly, "*O* was round."

"Nothing is round. Everything is either 'in' or 'square,' *Comprende?*"

"And Big O is *infradig?*"

"The infradiggest, or is it infradug? Anyhow, *compañero de mi vida* and all that jazz, you will not, repeat not, find any such cornball junk as Big O in Los Perros. Big H, we got, although it is becoming infradig next to LSD and banana peels. But if you *really* want a trip, I know where you can get some blackmarket model airplane glue."

"Real stuff," the other hippy whispered, "made in New Jersey with the old formula and smuggled out of the country disguised as toothpaste. Open a tube of that stuff under your nose, and Zoweeee!"

"Ask for Martínez the model maker," the first hippy whispered. "Third door on the right over the bowling alley. Tell them One-eyes and Gomez sent you. He'll even thrown in the paper bag, if you tell him you run with our clique."

"Thanks, guys." Randy smiled. "But I'm after absobloodylutely nothing but Big O."

"You wanna dame? I know one who's still a virgin. Slept with her myself."

"Big O. Nothing but Big. O. I have spoken."

"Okay. You don't like girls, how about a nice clean—"

"Nothing, but nothing, will I purchase but the real stuff."

"Dirty postcards?"

"Big O."

"Unbowlderized *Confessions of George Washington?*"

"Read it. Want some Big O."

"A used Edsel? With imitation-leopard seatcovers and a fox tail hanging from each outside rear-view mirror?"

"No," Randy muttered, walking away from the two hippies under the neon sign.

To his consternation, they fell in step behind him and one insisted, "How about a chopped Harley Davidson motorcycle pawned by a Hell's Angel who only rode it on Sunday, like to church? Has a banana seat, hand-painted flames curling back from the front, and we'll throw in an electric guitar and a gross of Iron Crosses."

"Sorry, fellows," Randy laughed, turning down a side street.

He shouldn't have done that.

The street was dark and narrow, even for Los Perros. Once he'd made the tactical error, Randy had no choice but to proceed as if he knew where he was going. Hoping against hope that the two hippies, whose tone had become increasingly bitter as they banged their cools against his sales resistance, would think that he had friends in this dark and dingy place.

"Like, *amigo*," One of them said, "why don't you *dig* us?"

"I dig you the most," Randy answered glibly. He had his gun and there were only two of them, and— Then he felt inside his jacket, and the hair on the back of his neck started tap-dancing with little icy feet.

The P-38 wasn't there!

For a horrible moment, Randy thought one of the punks had lifted it as they bantered with him back on the main drag. But to his relief, neither of them pulled a gun, his or anyone else's, as they moved in on either side and one of them snarled, "Like, hand it over, *hombre!*" No—neither of them drew a gun.

Both of them drew knives.

"Now, I ask you," said Randy Kidd, "is that any way to treat a buddy?"

"Buddy, no. *Yanqui, sí!*" the one in the Hollywood polo shirt said with a grin, swiping at the American's middle with his six-inch blade.

Randy stepped back, felt adobe bricks against his shoulder blades, and said something very original.

"That was a pretty vile thing to call any man, *hombre*," Hollywood-shirt snarled, blowing his cool.

"Even if it was true, you shouldn't have said it!" added his pal in the powder-blue cowboy boots.

"Hey, *cabrón!*" The first one scowled. "You watch *your* mouth too, eh? You know damned well it is not true!"

"Well, sure I guess." Cowboy-boots shrugged, grinning slyly in spite of his friend's ominous look.

Hollywood-shirt did not share in his humor. "You take that back!" he shouted.

"For why I have to take it back?" Cowboy-boots shouted back. "It was this lousy *gringo* who said it!"

Both turned to scowl at Randy. But Randy was no longer there to be scowled at. While they were arguing about their admittedly far-out sex lives, Randy Kidd had slid along the adobe wall to a point of possible escape.

Possible but not probable.

"Get him!" Hollywood-shirt screamed, throwing his knife end over end and thunking it into a telephone pole near Randy's head.

"*You* get him, you dumb *bastardo!*" Cowboy-boots whimpered. "He's got your knife!"

They still outnumbered him, but the American had an even break in the weaponry department. This was a little much for the hippies. Backing away with placating grins, they were now willing to let bygones be bygones. So was Randy. But to his considerable surprise, the one in cowboy boots suddenly screamed, "You . . . you *cut* me, man!"

"I did?" Randy blinked, surveying the ten- or twelve-foot gap between the two hippies and his swaying knife tip.

"*Ai, Carrrrramba!*" the other shouted in agony, "You got me, too!"

And then both of them fell down.

Randy Kidd surveyed them for a reasonable length of time, and then he said, "I get it, we're on 'Candid Camera,' right?"

"Wrong," a soft feminine voice whispered. "It was *I* who did the deed."

Slowly, Randy turned. The girl in the pink Mandarin dress was standing in the shadows of a nearby doorway, an inscrutable Oriental smile on her inscrutable Oriental lips.

"Lei Mi!" Randy gasped. "Did you shoot those hippies with a hypodermic hex?"

"I cannot tell a lie," answered Lei Mi, raising the weapon in her hand. "I did it with my little blue kazoo!"

It was dark in the room. Jasmine-scented incense hung like an invisible memory of an Oriental garden amid the more mundane odors of tobacco and sloe gin. Lei Mi stirred sleepily in Randy Kidd's arms and murmured, "I'd like another one, lover. Cigarette, I mean."

She waited until Randy had lighted two cigarettes at once, placed the extra one between her ruby lips, and blown smoke in her ear before she sighed, "Do you still doubt which side I'm on, Randy, my oversexed foreign devil?"

"I'll have to admit I like it better this way than I did the *last* time we met." Randy smiled. "But you still haven't told me why you want to switch teams, Lei Mi."

"It is very simple," Lei Mi sighed. "Doctor Fang, creep of the universe, is going to kill me, if you don't—sob!—help me to escape from his cruel clutches."

"I'll help you, Lei Mi," Randy soothed, patting her bare and tawny shoulder. "For Pete's sake, though, let's not start that *ferschloggen* crying again, huh?"

"I can't *help* it!" Lei Mi wailed. "After all I've *done* for that louse! I mean, who do you think it was that got him out of Hong Kong when the Chinese Reds, the Soviet Reds, and the Hong Kong branch of Household Finance were after him?"

"You?"

"*Me*, damn his eyes . . . and his cold feet, too! I mean, there I was, an innocent child of twenty-nine, working my way through night school by selling a little opium, and—"

"What did you say?" Randy cut in.

"About night school? I was taking a course in advanced safe cracking. It wasn't exactly a college-accredited course, but—"

"Never mind the school. Do you sell opium?"

"Do I sell opium? *Oy*, do *I* sell *opium!*"

"Can you get your hands on some Big O right here and now?"

"You mean right here and now in my apartment, Randy? Or do you mean here in Los Perros? Because if you mean here in my pad, you are out of luck. But if you mean here in Los Perros . . ."

"Oh, for crying out tears. Can you or can't you?"

"Sure. How much you need?"

"Couple of tons?"

"*Tons?* That's like a lot of O, handsome caucasoid of my heart!"

"We *need* a lot of O. *You* know what Fang's up to, doll. Unless we can lay in a supply of opium in time . . ."

"In time for what? I mean, a couple of tons of Big O would bomb everybody in town out of their skulls, O jewel of the Occident. By the way, did you hear what the Chinese father said when his daughter announced she'd gotten herself in a family way, courtesy of the United States Marines?"

"Occidents will happen?"

"You've been out with Chinese girls before!"

"Yes, and I'm delighted to say the rumor is not true. But about this opium, doll . . ."

"*I* don't have it. Not that much, anyway. But Big D might have some Big O."

"That sounds reasonable," Randy muttered. "Who's Big D?"

"Dorian Phalliphagus, commonly known as Big D, Dorian the Greek, or, if you want to sound really *in*, D the G."

"I've read about him." Randy brightened. "He's supposed to be an international go-for-pink-slips gambling man and allaround mystery guy, right? I never heard anything about him being a dope pusher, though."

"Of course not," Lei Mi laughed, "but you don't think anybody ever made an honest living *gambling*, do you?"

"I don't know. How about the boys in Las Vegas?"

"How about them? I didn't say you couldn't make a living. I said an *honest* living."

"The tables in Las Vegas are supposed to be run on the level."

"Who says? The guys who run them? Would you expect *them* to tell everyone they *weren't* run on the level?"

"You're pretty cynical, for a lady pirate and opium runner, Lei Mi," Randy answered. "What dark incident in your past has caused that pretty head of yours to be so full of uffishness and, while we're on the subject of crookedness, et cetera, how do I meet this D The G?"

"He'll kill you if you board his private yacht, den of vice and iniquity, and smuggling ship uninvited."

"Can you get me an invitation?"

"I could take you out to meet Big D," Lei Mi answered. "His yacht, the *Xenophobia II*, is anchored out there in yon harbor. But alas, Randy my round-eyed satyr, I dast not."

"Why dastn't?" Randy asked, gnawing on her neck.

"Because that foul fiend Fang fingered me for a fearful fate, the fink."

"I don't care for him either," Randy sighed. "By the way, my unbreakable china doll, how come this foolish fink Fang fingered you for a fiendish—aw, never mind, how come he's mad at you?"

"I made a boo-boo." Lei Mi shrugged. "When Doctor Fang sent me to kill you in the Alley of the Butterflies,

I shot you with a purple kazoo, the kind that only knocks you out. And then, when I led the ambush on Las Palmas Boulevard, I boo-booed again. I armed my minions with black kazoos, the kind that shoot you full of Aphroditic Plague, and the kind that *you*, my machine-gun-shooting sex maniac, are *immune* to."

"But you nailed Ahern. Does that mean . . . ?"

"Ahern Schmahern, I was supposed to kill *you!*"

"But you didn't." Randy smiled, holding her closer as he added, "*Twice* you had me in your kazoo sights, you little bundle of mischief, and twice you blew it by blowing the wrong kazoo. Was it because under your hard exterior beats the heart of . . . of a woman in love?"

"I don't *think* so," Lei Mi mused. "Of course, I love my mommy, and I'd love my daddy if I knew who he was, but . . ."

"Oh?" Randy sighed disappointedly. Then he brightened and said, "Under that criminal cunning you have a shred of human decency after all! You, Lei Mi, just aren't the kind of girl who'd stand idly by and watch ninety-nine percent of the human race, ah, love itself to death!"

"I'm not?" Lei Mi marveled. "Actually, I think it would be rather entertaining."

"Then there's only one answer." Randy frowned. "You've found out that, unlike Fang, the Blue Queen, and yours truly, *you*, Lei Mi, do *not* have type-O Blood, Diego factor positive, and—"

"Don't be silly! Would a hip international adventuress like myself mess around with a kook bent on wiping out the world if I thought it included *me?* Of *course* I've got type-O blood, Randy, Diego factor and all. No, I've fallen afoul of Fang for one reason and one reason alone. He issued us these color-coded kazoos with instructions to kill you and the Blue Queen, and I blew it."

"Because under your ridiculous cover story of being a Chinese pirate lady, you're *really* . . . Good God, you're name's not *Chumly*, is it?"

"Of British Intelligence? Is *he* here in Los Perros too?"

"He was. But Lei Mi, if you don't love me, and you don't care about the human race, and you're immune to the plague, and you're not working for British Intelligence . . . then *why* didn't you kill me with your color-coded kazoo?"

Lei Mi shrugged. "Simply because I happen to be—are you ready for this one?—*color blind!*"

Chapter FOURTEEN

In the cold gray light of dawn, or perhaps we should say warm gray light of dawn, since Los Perros lies south of the Tropic of Cancer (and north of the Tropic of Capricorn in case there are any Henry Miller fans out there in Radioland), Randy Kidd presented an odd appearance as he trudged along the waterfront with the large canvas laundry bag over his shoulder.

Captain Ahern, standing in the doorway of a closed fishing-tackle shop with a couple of guardsmen loaned to him by the local yokels, flashed a light on Randy as the tall American approached and said, "Merry Christmas, Santa Claus. Aren't we a little early with our bundle this year?"

"Laundry." Randy smiled. "I'm taking my laundry out to that Chinese junk in the harbor. Only place in town they don't use starch."

"At this hour?" mused Ahern, staring out into the gray mist where, amid the other yachts, banana peels, orange crates, and other debris floating like plankton offshore, there really *was* what looked like a Chinese junk. Ahern scored one point for Randy but asked, "Do you always take your laundry out this early?"

"Of course I take my laundry out this early. Like, who's laundry do *you* take out this early, Captain?"

"Let's see what's in the bag, Kidd."

"Don't you believe me, Captain?"

"I happen to know," Ahern laughed scornfully, "that the Chinese junk you claim to be visiting is *not* a laundry!"

"It's not?" Randy blinked innocently. "What is it then?"

"A floating bordello, run by an aging Hollywood Star reduced by circumstances to a life of shame. So, like

once more from the top, Kidd, let's see what's in the bag!"

"Ixnay on the agbay, Aptainkay!" Randy whispered. "Like, we're on the same side, remember?"

"Since when? Oh, you and the Blue Queen *did* call us in, when the going got tough, but that doesn't mean I have to *trust* you, see? like, what's in the bag?"

"You'd never believe me if I told you."

"I know I wouldn't. That why I want to see."

"Have you got a security clearance?"

"Of course I've got a security clearance!"

"A *top* security clearance?"

"Stalling won't help, Kidd. I want to see what you've got in that *ferschloggen* bag!"

"Okay." Randy Kidd shrugged. "But you won't like it. It's full of horse manure."

"I'll be the judge of what I like and don't like," Ahern growled, and then he blinked at Randy and asked, "Did you say . . . horse manure?"

"Not every bit of it," Randy conceded. Had an awful time getting that much on such short notice. Down at the stables, they had a couple of donkeys, and I told them you wouldn't mind if—"

"Let me have it!" Ahern shouted, losing his cool.

"You asked for it." Randy smiled, unfastening the cord that held the bag shut even as, with all his strength, he threw the bulky canvas bag to, or at, Ahern.

The CIA man, caught off-balance, sat down hard on the wet pavement, the bulky bundle of mystery in his lap. It didn't remain a bundle of mystery long, however. Bursting at the seams, the bag Randy had been carrying engulfed Captain Ahern in a messy mass of maloderous *merde*—to use the more delicate French for what Randy had said, quite truthfully, the bag contained.

Meanwhile, Lei Mi, as planned, had made use of Randy's distracting dungish doings to slip, unseen, into a previously prepared power launch she'd staked out under a nearby wharf. As Randy walked away, chuckling to himself sardonically, the slight *kerchung* of the starter

rope and the low purr of the motor were lost amid the reverberating curses of Captain Ahern. It wasn't until the tall American was nearly to the end of the wharf that Ahern managed to sputter, "Arrest him, you fools!"

"On what charge, señor my *capitán?*" one of the Republican Guards asked mildly.

"On the charge of felonious assault with a deadly weapon!" wailed Ahern. And then his voice trailed off as it came to him how all this would look in the report he would be duty bound to file when and if Randy Kidd was brought before the proper authorities. It also came to Ahern that he was not too clear, just at the moment, who those proper authorities would be, since the heinous crime Randy had just committed on his person was not covered by any regulations he could remember reading.

"Do you weesh me to shoot heem in the leg, señor my *capitán?*" the guardsman asked. "He looks like he is going to jump off the end of the wharf."

"Let him go," Ahern muttered. "If the silly bastard wants to go swimming at this hour, I can only hope he has the decency to drown."

"He will not drown," my *capitán.*" The guardsman shrugged. "Not eef he goes sweeming in the harbor of Los Perros."

"*Muchos tiburones!*" the other guard agreed. "How you say een English? Many charks!"

"Sharks?" Ahern asked in sudden interest.

"*Sí, muchos tiburones.* And many charks, too!"

"Good," Ahern growled, as Randy took a nonchalant grip on the ladder leading down to the water's edge and waved byebye to the man he'd just manured.

Actually, he didn't intend to go swimming with charks or sharks, or even *tiburones.* While he'd distracted Ahern with his bag of tricks, Lei Mi had tooled the powerboat into position near the base of the ladder. By the time Ahern was beginning to wonder why he wasn't hearing any splashes, Randy and Lei Mi were well on their way to the sinister-looking yacht tethered out in the harbor.

And so it was that Randy Kidd made his first, and last, visit to *Xenophobia II*, a garish, sixty-foot floating hotrod that looked like it might well have been designed by Big Daddy Roth.

"You say this Dorian Phalliphagus is a big-time opium smuggler as well as an allaround international bad guy?" Randy mused as they approached the Las Vegas lavender side of the *Xenophobia II*.

"That's what I said," Lei Mi answered, and Randy, facing away as he was from her inscrutable Oriental face, failed to catch the look of Mona Lisaesque intrigue that flashed momentarily across Lei Mi's countenance. For you see, Gentle Reader out there in Radioland, Lei Mi was lying about the opium. Lei Mi was lying about her reasons for taking, or luring, Randy aboard the *Xenophobia II*. But as you might have guessed by now, Lei Mi liked to lie.

Chapter FIFTEEN

FROM: AGENT M-77, COVER NAME DORIAN PHALLIPHAGUS, ABOARD SECRET SOVIET SPY VESSEL XENOPHOBIA II
TO: OFFICE OF SOVIET MILITARY INTELLIGENCE, GENOCIDE SECTION
SUBJECT: MINION OF NEFARIOUS DOCTOR FANG AND AMERICAN AGENT IN CLUTCHES
ITEM #1: THIS MORNING WE WERE BOARDED BY UNINVITED GUESTS CONSISTING BY ONE LEI MI, CHINESE PIRATE LADY CLAIMING TO BE DEFECTING FROM DOCTOR FANG'S INTERNATIONAL PLOT ORGANIZATION, AND ONE RANDY KIDD, ASSISTANT TO NOTORIOUS SPY LADY BLUE QUEEN. LEI MI, PRESUMING ON PREVIOUS BUSINESS ASSOCIATION WHILE I WAS PRETENDING TO RUN OPIUM INTO SAIGON (WHILE ACTUALLY RUNNING GUNS TO VIETCONG UNDER NOSES OF FOOLISH AMERICAN NAVY, HA HA), HAS APPARENTLY BROUGHT TRICKY RANDY KIDD OUT TO NEGOTIATE LARGE SALE OF OPIUM. REAL OPIUM. THEY SAY OPIUM IS ONLY CURE FOR APHRODITIC PLAGUE. PERHAPS IS TRUE. BUT I DO NOT HAVE OPIUM. HAVE HOLD FULL OF GUNS AND AMMUNITION PENDING DELIVERY TO LOCAL REBEL FACTION (ONCE OUR BOYS HAVE TAKEN OVER PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT).
ITEM #2: WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?
DORIAN PHALLIPHAGUS (M77)

TO: AGENT M77 AND OTHER STUPIDS ABOARD XENOPHOBIA II
IDIOTS! WHY DID YOU EVEN ALLOW TREACH-

EROUS COUPLE ABOARD? YOU KNOW PENDING REVOLUTION HAS TOP PRIORITY IN LOS PERROS! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN FANG'S FOOLISHNESS WAS RED HERRING TO KEEP JERK AMERIKANSKI CIA BUSY WHILE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT TOOK OVER ANOTHER WORKERS' PARADISE? LET EMBASSY STAFF WORRY ABOUT CATCHING UP WITH FANG AND LIQUIDATING JERK CHINESE SCIENTIST. (HIS MENACE PROBABLY PEKING PROPAGANDA IN FIRST PLACE. IN SECOND PLACE, COLONEL CHAVOSKY GOT RIGHT KIND OF BLOOD.)

WHAT YOU MEAN WHAT ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO DO, IDIOT OF WORLD? TORTURE LEI MI. SHE MIGHT KNOW SOMETHING INTERESTING. AMERICAN SHOULD HAVE BEEN LIQUIDATED BY NOW. IF HE HASN'T BEEN, GIVE SELF TEN DEMERITS AND GET WITH IT. KILL KIDD!

HEADQUARTERS

TO: HEADQUARTERS FROM M77

IS PROBLEM. BECAUSE WAS ADVISABLE TO PROVIDE COVER FOR JUST HANGING AROUND WAITING FOR REVOLUTION TO START, I HAVE STAGED SLIGHT BRAWL ABOARD XENOPHOBIA II. GOT LOCAL ARMY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, SEVERAL HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS, AND SOME HOLLYWOOD STARLETS ABOARD FOR CHAMPAGNE BREAKFAST FOLLOWING LAST NIGHT'S SLIGHT ORGY. IS, AT MOMENT, A BIT CROWDED FOR TORTURE AND/OR ASSASSINATION, IN FIRST PLACE. IN SECOND, LEI MI HAS COMPLICATED HER SITUATION ABOARD YACHT RIGHT NOW.

M77 (DORIAN PHALLIPHAGUS.)

P.S. WOULD YOU MIND IF I CHANGED TO OTHER GREEK NAME?

TO: DORIAN PHALLIPHAGUS (M77) FROM HEADQUARTERS
STUPID SOVIET SPY:
WHO TOLD YOU TO STAGE ORGY ABOARD SOVIET SPY VESSEL? NICHIVOO ORGY, TELL US ABOUT COMPLICATIONS. COLONEL CHAVOSKY WOULD ALSO LIKE TO KNOW WHO HOLLYWOOD STARLETS ARE AND WHERE YOU WERE ABLE TO GET INTRODUCTION. COLONEL CHAVOSKY WOULD ALSO LIKE TO KNOW WHAT IS WRONG WITH PERFECTLY GOOD GREEK NAME HE PICKED OUT FOR YOU.

HEADQUARTERS

TO: HEADQUARTERS
FROM: NOT SO DOPEY M77
COMPLICATION ABOUT LEI MI IS SIMPLE. SHE IS NOT ABOARD YACHT. SHORTLY AFTER SHE AND RANDY KIDD ARRIVED, LEI MI WENT POWDER ROOM AND NEVER CAME OUT. IS NO PORTHOLE LARGE ENOUGH FOR HER TO HAVE ESCAPED, AND IF SHE DID JUMP OVERBOARD, IS SHARK-INFESTED HARBOR. RANDY KIDD IS CONFUSED AS ANYONE ABOUT HER DISAPPEARANCE BUT IS AT MOMENT ENJOYING HOSPITALITY OF YACHT IN CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM WITH ONE CHU-CHU LAVERNE, ONE OF STARLETS YOU ASKED ABOUT.
FURTHER QUESTIONING REVEALS THEY ARE NOT EXACTLY STARLETS. MORE LIKE GIRLS ON WAY TO STARDOM (YOU MIGHT CALL THEM COSMONAUGHTIES) OR FALLEN BY WAYSIDE LADIES FROM CHINESE JUNK OWNED BY EX HOLLYWOOD ACTOR GAY-

LORD FUDD. (YOU WILL RECALL OLD PHRASE "IN LIKE FUDD" WAS VERY POPULAR A WHILE BACK.) FUDD, HAVING LOST HIS HAIR, HIS TEETH, AND AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP, HAS COMBINED BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE AND NOW RUNS FLOATING HAREM/BORDELLO NAMED "WON HUNG LO." DURING PARTIES STAGED ABOARD XENOPHOBIA II, COMRADE FUDD HAS BEEN GOOD FRIEND OF SELF AND CREW. ALSO, HIS PRICES ARE QUITE PROLETARIAN.

AS TO NAME CHOSEN BY COLONEL CHAVOSKY FOR UNFORTUNATE HETEROSEXUAL SOVIET SPY, CAN ONLY SUGGEST COLONEL IS EITHER IGNORANT OF GREEK OR A SERIOUS SECURITY RISK.

M77 (DORIAN (SOB) PHALLIPHAGUS.)

Chapter SIXTEEN

It was midafternoon by the time Captain Ahern met Regina on Las Palmas Boulevard. The Blue Queen nodded at the CIA man and the ubiquitous Doctor Crawllaway, who'd accompanied the captain to his tryst in front of The Music Shop.

"This the place?" Captain Ahern growled, clearly in an uffish mood as he glared into the dark interior of the store.

Regina sniffed delicately, then a bit deeper as she asked, "Is that a new cologne you're wearing, Captain honey?"

"I don't smell nothing," Ahern lied. He'd taken three showers and changed his clothes twice, but in the heat and humidity of a Los Perros afternoon, there was still a distinctive aroma of horse in his immediate vicinity.

Trying the door, Regina answered, "This must be the place, Captain Ahern sugar. "I don't know why nobody else thought of checking music stores in Los Perros. I mean, after all, how many music stores *are* there, and this one's the only place that's placed a great many orders recently for—are you ready folks?—*KAZOOS!*"

"It seems to be closed." Crawllaway sniffed, staring at the locked and barred front door.

Ahern nodded and then said, "Wait a minute. Why would they be closed on a weekday?"

"*Siesta?*"

"Maybe, but we can't hang around until the owner gets back, and I think Miss Regina may just have something. After all, this fiendish felon Fang *has* been using a lot of kazoos lately, and he must be getting them *someplace!*"

"But," Crawllaway objected, "according to Miss Regina's theory, Fang's kazoos are special ones. Made to look like kazoos but actually serving as deadly blowguns!"

"Well *sure*, Docky-wocky honey." Regina dimpled. "But if they *look* like kazoos, they must be getting shipped into the country *as* kazoos. I mean, I checked first to see whether anyone here in Los Perros manufactures sheet-metal toys and novelties, and when I found out no one did, I just started lookin' until I found me a little old store that had been ordering oodles and oodles of kazoos, or something that looked like kazoos and—"

"Maybe," Crawllaway objected, "kazoos are, ah, *popular* in Los Perros?"

"Maybe they are and maybe they ain't," Ahern growled, throwing a beefy shoulder against the door. "But there's only one way to find out!"

And then he fell through the open door, to crash heavily on the dusty tile floor amid a welter of Anglo-Saxon.

"I thought," Regina mused, "the door was locked."

"That makes two of us," Ahern muttered, getting to his feet and dusting himself off. He looked around and shrugged. "Doesn't look like they do much business here. The joint's full of dust and cobwebs."

"Yet they keep ordering kazoos," Regina marveled. "Doesn't that strike you as, ah, funny, Captain honey?"

"Since I met you and that damned Randy Kidd," Ahern muttered, "nothing strikes me as funny. But it is kind of weird that this store just sits here, gathering dust instead of customers."

"Perhaps," Regina mused, "it's not a store at all. Could it be that this . . . this unprepossessing little music shop is, in actuality, the secret hideout of Doctor Fang?"

"Could be." Ahern shrugged. "We've looked everywhere *else* in Los Perros. But if this is the secret hideout of Doctor Fang, there seems to be one thing missing."

"What's that, Captain honey?"

"Doctor Fang. Like, there's nobody here but us chickens!"

"Maybe." Regina smiled. And *her* smile was getting a wee bit Mona Lisaesque by now, not only because it was

getting near the end of the story but because she was having some very sneaky thoughts.

Gazing down at the dusty floor, Regina said, "You can see where someone's been walking from the locked front door to the back of the store. To the vicinity of that grandfather's clock against yon wall, in fact. Do either of you boys have any idea why someone sneaking in here through the dust and cobwebs would make a beeline for that clock?"

"Maybe to see what time it was." Crawllaway shrugged.

"Or because that clock is not a clock but a *secret door!*" Regina smiled. Innocently, she added, "Do you have the key to that door, Doctor Crawllaway honey?"

"Key?" Crawllaway blinked. "Why should I have a key to that door, ah, I mean, clock?"

"Yeah." Ahearn frowned. "Why should good old kindly Doctor Crawllaway have a key to that clock, I mean door?"

"Because he had a key to the front door." Regina smiled. "Oh, yes, I *did* try to open the front door, Doctor sugar. And it *was* locked. But when you say how big, strong Captain Ahern was fixing to bust it down, you quick like a bunny unlocked it!"

"Why," Crawllaway sniffed, "would I do a thing like that?"

"Yeah," asked Ahern, "why would good old kindly Doc do a dumb thing like that?"

"Because," Regina answered simply, "Doctor Crawllaway, our kindly old duffer in the Hoover collar and specs, is not Doctor Crawllaway but—hang on to your hats, folks—the infamous archfiend *DOCTOR FANG!*"

All things must come to an end, even Chu-Chu Laverne. And so it was, as the afternoon wore on, that Randy Kidd found himself, gin and tonic in hand, standing on the sun deck of the *Xenophobia II*, sizing up the crowd for further conquests.

His host, the suspiciously named Dorian Phalliphagus, found him there and approached, his own drink poised like a dagger, to ask, "Hey, sport, you seen that zonked-out Lei Mi anyplace aboard this tub yet?"

"I've looked all over the place for her." Randy frowned. "But she just doesn't seem to be aboard. About this opium deal we came to see you about . . ."

"Opium?" Phalliphagus asked, in a travesty of innocence. He was a burly man, with eyebrows that met in the middle and skin the color of rennet custard, and he was covered, everywhere but the top of his head, by what looked like stray wisps of steel wool. His somewhat Alley Oopish appearance was set off, to an extent, by the pale lemon slacks and a print sport shirt splashed with Tiffany colors and designed by someone on LSD. His accent was early Vaudeville Greek, with just a hint of Slavic. Randy, who did know a little classical Greek, was listening, a bit nervously, for any trace of Columbus Circle. But if Big D was anything but what he seemed to be, a heterosexual Slav pretending to be a Greek, Randy could not detect it. He repeated his question about the opium, and once more Big D looked stupid and innocent. Or at any rate, stupid.

"Lei Mi told me," Randy insisted, "that you were an international bad guy who could tell us how to latch on to some Big O."

"She's a great kidder, sport." Big D smiled, displaying a set of stainless-steel dentures that reminded Randy very much of a similar set of steel choppers he'd once seen in the GUM Department Store. Like, in Moscow.

"You don't have any Big O aboard, Big D?" he frowned.

"No Big O. No Big P. No Big Q, sport. You been messing around in the hold, sport?"

"Well, I was sort of looking around the ship. Like for Lei Mi."

"Sure, sport." Randy noticed that, like most Vaudeville Greeks, Dorian Phalliphagus pronounced sure "sewer." And then he heard Big D say, "You didn't happen to

look *inside* any of those crates in the hold, did you, sport?"

"That wouldn't have been ethical," Randy sniffed delicately.

"See that you don't," Big D snapped, walking away to settle some argument that had broken out across the deck. Randy watched him, noting that he moved both arms together when he walked, like a professional wrestler, or an ape, as he wondered what in the world Big D, opium smuggler of the world, was doing with all those Skoda machine pistols in his hold.

"I say," a voice whimpered in his ear, "You are going to drink that, aren't you?"

Randy turned to stare at the ravaged wreck of what had once been a handsome man. He was still tall and carried his head with a swashbuckle air, but the head was bald and toothless and the hand he held out in supplication was decidedly shaky. Randy held out the gin and tonic and, as the scarecrow travesty of a dashing character took it in both trembling hands, said, "You look familiar. Haven't I seen you someplace before?"

"Look, old boy," the scarecrow growled, "just because I'm on this pansy's yacht—"

"I have it!" Randy chortled. "You're Gaylord Fudd!"

The ravaged wreck, having drained the glass in three gulps, lowered it and stared at Randy. Then a sloppy, drunken smile spread over his face like a can of Sherwin Williams paint covering the globe of the world. Except that the globe of the world didn't have as many lines on it.

"Bless you, my child," Gaylord Fudd said; "even if you *are* a transvestite. Do you want my autograph?"

"I have one." Randy smiled. "Sent away for your autographed picture when I was a kid. You were in that picture where you slid down the sail of this pirate ship, ripping the canvas with a knife between your teeth as you slid. I sat through that picture a zillion times and vowed, when I grew up, to be in like Fudd."

"And have you?"

"Have I what, grown up or been in like Fudd?"

"Both."

"I have, master. But it wasn't easy."

"Not even for me," sighed Fudd, "but what are you doing out here on this nefarious nut's boat, my little fan? Don't you know this is a dangerous place for a growing boy to play?"

"I came with a friend." Randy shrugged.

"Then be smart and leave with a friend," Gaylord Fudd answered. "I'm about to leave for my *own* yacht, the *Won Hung Lo*. If you'd care to join me, I can always use some male reinforcements aboard that damned drifting bordello of mine. I assume you like girls, of course?"

"Of course. But some other time, Mr. Fudd."

"There may not be another time, Randy my fan. I mean, it may be later than you think and, aw, come on, Kidd!"

"You knew my name!" Randy frowned.

"Well, sure. You sent for one of my pictures, remember?"

"I remember we weren't introduced, Fudd. What's the pitch?"

"You'd never believe me if I told you, old boy."

"Try me."

"Teddibly sorry. I cawn't. But if I were you, Randy, I'd be getting my jolly arse off this ruddy tub, while I could still move it. Besides, I *like* you, and we need an extra hand for bridge."

"Later, maybe." Randy shrugged. "I've got to find the chick I came out here with."

"You won't, you know," Fudd sighed. Then, as he saw Randy had no intention of going along, or even heeding his warning, Gaylord Fudd left him to his fate and wandered off, muttering to himself. The last Randy saw of the faded Hollywood film star, Fudd was going over the side, clambering down a Jacob's ladder with surprising grace for a man as obviously drunk as Fudd was, into a waiting launch manned by a bevy of buxom beauties in skin-tight yachting uniforms.

Shrugging and saddened by the fickle finger of fate's fast finish, Randy walked aft to the ship's bar to replenish his glass and forget, if only for a moment, how we all grow so soon old and so late smart. Wavering toward him from the bar, clad only in panties and bra, was a familiar figure with red hair. It was—incredibly alive at this late date—Baby Jane Dough!

"You are alive!" Randy gasped.

"And swinging, squeaky-clean lover!" Baby Jane Dough burbled. She waved the large chromed cocktail shaker she was carrying and added, "I'm taking this to a sick friend."

"But *you're* supposed to be sick!" Randy insisted. "You smell roses and, ah, make love like a rabbit!"

"I am trying to become a legend in my own time," replied Baby Jane Dough. "And I really must be going, lover. I've promised to show some of the boys in the crew how I was initiated into the Hell's Angels during my formative years."

"You," Randy insisted, falling into step beside her, "are doomed, Baby Jane, unless I get you to shore and fill you full of opium!"

"You're sweet, squeaky-clean lover." She dimpled. "But I'm on LSD and banana peels right now. Care to come along with me to the fo'c'sle? I don't know how many boys there are in the train, but like I said, I'm a legend in my own time."

"There you are, sport," laughed Dorian Phalliphagus, stepping out from behind an air scoop and beaming at Randy and Baby Jane with all the fondness of a fatherly weasel in a chicken coop. He looked at Baby Jane, licked his lips, and added, "*Hell-o*, where did you come from, my little cabbage?"

"Your accent's slipping, gorilla man," Baby Jane laughed, girlishly. "And I'm not coming. I'm going. Like to pull a train."

"First you give Beeg D leetle kees, eh? What's een cocktail shaker, leetle cabbage? You geev Beeg D a beeg dreenk, yes?"

"I give you big drink no, you creepy thing," Baby Jane sniffed. "Like, mix your own sauce, boss."

"That ees my sauce, eef you meex heem on *Xenophobia II*." Big D frowned. "And while we are on subject, Keed, Big Ð don't remember inwiting you aboard!"

"Who waits to be inwited?" Baby Jane laughed, adding, "Your accent's slipping again, Boris baby!"

"I'll Boris you!" Big D roared. "But first, we weel see what ees *really* een cocktail shaker, yes?"

"No! Get away from me!" Baby Jane wailed. "Like, I've got the Aphroditic Plague and bad breath, too. Randy! Make him get away from me."

"I though you didn't know my name!" Randy mused. And while Randy mused, Big D moved in on Baby Jane. The readhead hesitated a split second, and then, just as Randy was moving forward to help her, she screamed pathetically and jumped overboard!

"Baby Jane!" cried Randy.

"Leetle cabbage!" shouted Big D.

"Splash!" went Baby Jane.

She didn't come up.

For a long time, the two of them stood there, gazing down at the bubbles rising from where Baby Jane and her mysterious cocktail shaker had vanished. Then Randy sighed, "I guess she must have been out of her head, poor little kook. Do you think she . . . drowned?"

"I doubt it." Big D shrugged, all trace of his Vaudeville Greek accent gone. "I imagine the shark finished her off before she had *time* to drown!"

"Glug!" muttered Randy. "They're that bad, eh?"

"Yet." Dorian Phalliphagus, also known as Boris Stobabakski, Agent M77, smiled. "They are, as you say, that bad!"

And then he pushed Randy Kidd overboard.

Chapter SEVENTEEN

Captain Ahern stared in bewilderment at Regina as the Blue Queen pointed scornfully at Doctor Crawllaway and repeated, "Yes, Doctor Fang, your masquerade as a simple U.S. State Department medical examiner is over at last."

"Shucks!" said Doctor Fang, peeling off his flesh-colored rubber mask to reveal a lean, evil face of more Oriental appearance. He took a couple of breaths, brightened considerably, and added, "It was getting awfully stuffy in there, anyway."

Ahern's jaw dropped as he digested what had happened. And then, staring at what had up until a moment ago been Doctor Crawllaway, he asked, "How did you know it was him, Miss Regina?"

"It had to be somebody." Regina shrugged. "Once I figured *that* out, the rest was easy."

She pointed at Fang and continued, "Doctor Fang was here in Los Perros, but with every major power sending secret agents in to search for him, and with the full cooperation of the local authorities, nobody could find him. *Ipso facto*, he had to be in disguise."

"Yes, but how did you suspect it was Crawllaway?"

"I didn't, at first. Although I knew from the start it had to be someone in our own CIA. Someone near the top. There was even a time, Captain honey, when I suspected it might be you. But as Randy pointed out, you weren't smart enough to be Doctor Fang."

"Gee, thanks a lot," Ahern muttered. "How'd you figure it was the doc here?"

"Yes," Fang asked in surprisingly mild tone for a man who'd just been unmasked as the archfink wanted by every country in the world, "how did you?"

"It had to be someone in the CIA because, of all the spy outfits in Los Perros, the CIA was the *only* one that didn't know anything about the Aphroditic Plague. I mean, fun's fun, boys, but even the CIA should have been able to find out *that* much, unless, of course, somebody was deliberately keeping you-all in the dark. Now, who, besides your own medical examiner, would have been able to cover up the fact that the CIA men turning up dead were victims of a disease and not some nonexistent poison?"

"Crawllaway, I mean Fang," Ahern growled, "that was real dirty, you know that?"

"So I'm dirty." Fang smiled. "I saved *your* life a couple of times, round-eyed clod."

"Saved my life?" Ahern blinked.

"Only because he needed you," Regina explained. "Remember when they put a dart in you, Captain honey? Crawllaway, or Fang, said there wasn't anything on the dart. Now, that just didn't make sense, even for a zonked-out mad scientist."

"Mad?" Fang frowned, his face showing much more expression, now that he'd taken his Crawllaway mask off. "Who is to say who is mad and who is merely expressing himself in his own way?"

"Never mind about that!" Ahern cut in. "What was on that there dart your henchmen shot me with?"

"Plague germs." Fang shrugged. "Actually, it should have been nerve poison, but that accursed girl Lei Mi blew the bit. However, I was sincerely glad that you were still alive when Randy Kidd brought you in for first aid."

"Because you—gee—*liked* me?"

"Because he needed you, Captain honey," Regina sighed.

"Needed me? But why would Doctor Fang, archfiend and allaround fink, need *me*, red-blooded American boy?"

"Shall you tell him, Doctor Fang honey," Regina asked

dryly, "or do I have to be the one to break the bad news?"

"I will tell the foreign devil with, heh heh, *pleasure!*" Fang chortled. "I needed you, Captain Ahern, because you were *stupid!*"

"That wasn't very nice of you, Doc."

"Perhaps not. But it's the truth, Captain. I knew that if you died, they'd replace you. Even the U.S. State Department goofs up occasionally, you know, and they *might* have replaced you with someone with brains!"

"And so," Regina put in, "every time Captain Ahern was exposed to your Aphroditic Plague, Doctor Fang, you administered an antidote?"

"Precisely!"

"And that antidote was Terramycine?"

"You . . . you peeked!"

"No. But it stands to reason that if antibiotics can cure one form of plague they should be able to cure another."

"That's one of the little bugs I'm trying to work out of my germs," Fang conceded. "Like the problem I'm having with transmitting the infection by air. I mean, I can't wipe out the human race with my Aphroditic Plague if there's a cure, can I? And it's been devilishly difficult to kill enough people to matter with those damned kazoos!"

"But Doc," Ahern said, frowning, "you said the plague could only be cured by opium, and you said there wasn't no such thing, and then you said there wasn't anything on those darts and . . ." Then he saw the look that passed between Doctor Fang and the Blue Queen and, smiling sheepishly, mumbled, "Golly, I guess you *lied*, huh?"

"Over and over again." Fang shrugged wearily.

"You were telling us about your germs, Fangy-wangy," Regina said. "Like, I'd just love to have you show us where your little old secret laboratory is. I'll just bet you've got it tucked behind this little old clock, haven't you?"

"As a matter of fact, it's in the cellar." Fang smiled, and then, laughing fiendishly, he pressed a secret button on a nearby counter, and Regina, along with Captain Ahern, fell screaming through the yawning trapdoor that opened suddenly beneath their feet!

Chapter EIGHTEEN

"I do believe," a voice was saying from somewhere far far away, "that Mr. Kidd is coming around at last."

Randy Kidd, coughing up a last teacup of vile-tasting salt water, opened his eyes to see Lei Mi and a familiar face from his past looking down at him. He propped himself up on the deck of the *Won Hung Lo* and asked Gaylord Fudd, "Who pulled me out of that shark-infested water?"

"Miss Forsyth here," Fudd laughed. "She's an excellent swimmer, in addition to her, ah, other talents, and the sharks haven't been able to live in this harbor for years. Sewage, you know."

"I know." Randy grimaced, spitting out another mouthful of salty sewage. "But *something* pulled me under, dammit! I remember hitting the water, coming up, having Big D take a shot at me, and then something got me by the leg and . . ."

"Miss Forsyth grabbed you by the leg," Fudd explained. "She's a trained underwater-demolitions expert and—"

"Wait a minute!" Randy cut in, taking another look at the inscrutable Oriental beauty who was in the act of popping out her slant-eyed contact lenses, "You mean that Lei Mi, Chinese pirate lady of Hong Kong, is really . . . ?"

"Cynthia Forsyth, of Her Majesty's service. "Lei Mi/Cynthia/Felicidad smiled, removing her black wig.

"But dammit! You told me you *didn't* work for British Intelligence!"

"I lied." Cynthia/Felicidad . . . oh, never mind, said. She smiled with becoming maidenly modesty as she added, "We British Intelligence agents throw ourselves into our parts rather well, don't you think?"

"But . . . how? I mean, where did you vanish to, right after we boarded the *Xenophobia II?*"

"Into the powder room, of course. I saw that Big D was either on to my real purpose in visiting the yacht, or he was just being obstinate on general Russian principles to any Chinese, and so I simply changed into someone else and waited my turn to slip over the side with my, ah, cocktail shaker."

"Cocktail shaker?" Randy blinked. And then, as what she'd said sank in, he groaned and sighed, "Oh, no! You don't mean to tell me that you were Baby Jane Dough, too!"

"Oh, but I do, or I did," Cynthia laughed. "Baby Jane Dough was my first cover story. I was supposed to be a madcap American jeterina. The kind nobody pays any attention to—as a brain, that is. I managed to get invited out to the *Xenophobia II* over the weekend and find out where Big D had the guns hidden, but then I stumbled over Doctor Fang's plot, swiped a kazoo, and wound up getting shot by one of his henchmen. Naturally, I had to pretend I was dying of the, ah, Aphroditic Plague."

"You sure as hell threw yourself into *that* part!" Randy said admiringly. "But tell me, where does—or did—Lei Mi fit into all this?"

"Well, once we had Big D and his gun-running operation more or less on ice, there was very little for me to do but to wait until orders came to, ah, take care of the matter. So while we were waiting around, I infiltrated Fang's organization as the girl who once helped him escape from Red China. There really was a Lei Mi, you know. But she was killed a few years ago, running guns to the Vietcong."

"Oh? Did our guys get her, or did the VC double-cross her, or did the Russians kill her to knock out the competition?"

"Nothing so simple. She made the mistake of mixing Coca-Cola and Nuoc-Mam Fish Sauce on an empty stomach and . . ."

"But Lei Mi, I mean Cynthia, I mean Felicidad, I mean Baby Jane? I mean, oh hell, doll, how were you able to fool Fang? Didn't he *know* this Lei Mi?"

"Oh, certainly, but you know how it is—all Orientals look alike."

"I'll let that one pass," Randy growled, "but you still haven't told me why you pulled me out of the water and aboard this floating bordello run by a disolute Hollywood actor."

"Renfrew, of Her Majesty's service, old boy," the man calling himself Gaylord Fudd cut in. "And this is not a floating bordello after all. The *Won Hung Lo* is eck-chooley H.M.S. *Sangrail*, a floating British Intelligence Headquarters, and rather good tea canteen, what?"

"You could have fooled me," Randy sighed. "But what ever happened to the *real* Gaylord Fudd?"

"I happen to *be* the real Gaylord Fudd." Gaylord Fudd smiled.

"I know," Randy sighed wearily, "you British Intelligence agents really throw your *fershloggen* selves into your parts and . . . You *still* haven't told me what the bit with the *Xenophobia II* is all about!"

"*Was* all about," Fudd said a trifle grimly, glancing at his watch. "You see, the Soviets have been planning for some time now to help a local faction stage a revolution that would out-Castro Castro."

"I thought *our* State Department handled things like Castro's Communist takeover in Cuba."

"Ahem, yes. That's the main reason that *this* time, we'd rather do it ourselves. Anyhow, the leader of the rebels is on board the *Xenophobia II* at this very moment. He's supposed to be enjoying a harmless all-day orgy, but of course, his real reason for visiting Big D is to arrange for the landing, up the coast, of the arms and ammunition the *Xenophobia II* carries in her hold. Or perhaps I should say, since it is now almost the time we set the, ah, cocktail shaker for, *carried*, past tense, in her hold."

"I'm afraid I don't understand." Randy frowned.

"You will." Cynthia Forsyth smiled.

And in a very short time, Randy did. With a horrendous roar, the *Xenophobia II* and everything and everybody on it blew into a zillion teenyweeny bits that fluttered down from the large mushroom-shaped cloud rising from the fetid harbor of Los Perros.

"You clamped the cocktail-shaker bomb to the hull right after you—or should I say Baby Jane?—jumped overboard." Randy smiled. It was a statement, not a question.

"Fortunately for you," Fudd added, "since, as you will recall, *I* was unable to get off the *Xenophobia II* before the bomb was due to go off. Our friend Big D, or M77, did you the unintended courtesy of pushing you overboard. And so Cynthia here was able to . . . I say, Cynthia, what ever happened to your *hair?*"

Randy swung his head to look in sudden amazement at Cynthia, who, to his horror, had taken off the wig she'd been wearing under the other wigs and was now as bald as a billiard ball. Having popped out the cardboard-gray contact lenses she'd been wearing under the other contact lenses, Cynthia, or whoever she was, stood revealed as a bald-headed, pink-eyed young lady who was, at the moment, pointing a very large pistol at both men.

"Cynthia!" gasped Gaylord Fudd of British Intelligence. "What . . . what is the meaning of this! Who . . . who *are* you?"

"*Ich heis Ursula von Schmuckengruber!*" hissed Cynthia/Felicidad/Lei Mi/Baby Jane Dough, "und, now zat you schtupid Britisch und Americanishen Schweinhunds have viped out ze Communists here in Los Perros, us *Neo-Nazis* ist taking over!"

Chapter NINETEEN

"I imagine," said Captain Ahern, as another drop dripped on his forehead, "that this will drive us mad, after a time."

"I imagine it will," said Regina dryly. And this was not easy to do, since she and Captain Ahern were both getting pretty wet by this time. They'd been undergoing the Chinese water torture since shortly after coming to in the cellar of the foul fiend's music shop–hidey hole–secret laboratory and finding themselves tied, nude, to X-shaped torture thigamajigs. As they struggled to free themselves from their semireclining positions on the thigamajigs, a slow but steady drop-by-drop dripping dropped on them from overhead, ah, drop droppers. The water was cold and not doing a thing for Regina's makeup as it splashed against her upturned face. They'd been there for several hours, at least, and the whole thing was getting to be a bore.

So was Captain Ahern. "Fang will regret this, Miss Regina," he growled, shaking water from his hair with an impatiant toss of his head. "He'll regret this as long as he lives. Do you have *any* idea of what this will mean on his Civil Service Efficiency Report?"

"I don't think it's likely to matter," Regina muttered. "Since, if we don't manage somehow to warn the world that Fang's about to turn his plague loose on an unsuspecting mankind, there won't *be* any civil service . . . unless Fang starts one of his own."

"I wonder," Ahern mused, wincing as another drop dripped, "what sort of civil service rating a guy would give himself if he had his own civil service."

"How about Emperor of the World?" Regina suggested.

"How about Emperor of the Universe?" Fang chortled, coming into view from around a Frankensteinian collection of glass tubing and . . . stuff, down at one end of the large room he used as a laboratory and friendly neighborhood torture chamber.

"Fangy-wangy honey," Regina purred, "would you mind turning down the water just a teenyweeny bit? Like, it's ruining my mascara and—"

"I'll not only turn it down, I'll turn it off," Fang cackled, "if you'll do just one little thing for *me*."

"What's that, Fang honey?"

"Marry me and help me rule the universe!"

"I was afraid of that," Regina sighed. "Forget what I said about the water, Fang daddy. Who needs mascara anyway?"

"What! You spurn my advances?" Fang snarled. "Don't you realize, curse you, that you are completely, heh heh, in my power?"

"Power schmower." Regina shrugged. "You still haven't got your secret weapon perfected, Fang sugar—or should I just call you (I'm sorry, folks) *sweet tooth?*"

"Ahah, but I *have!*" Fang laughed, and it was not a nice laugh as he added, "Only this morning I managed, through the use of radioactive isotopes and other scientific-type jazz, to cause a further mutation of my germs, and at last I have developed a *pneumonic* form of Aproditic Plague!"

"Well, goody for you!" Regina muttered.

"And so you see, my little jasmine blossom," Fang continued, unbuckling his belt, "I *am* ready to become master of the universe, and you, my Blue Queen, shall become my Blue Empress!"

"Don't you have any red-hot pokers, or perhaps a sandpaper dildo, you dirty old man?" Regina began. And then her cool almost vanished as she saw what he was doing.

"For Pete's sake, Doc," Ahern growled, "put your pants back on!"

"Not," Fang cackled gleefully, "until I have claimed

what is mine by right of conquest! I am mad for you, you jasmine-scented oodle of Occidental flesh!" Fang oozed closer to Regina as the Blue Queen struggled in vain to free herself from the cruel thongs that thung her to the thigamajig. Fang suddenly sniffed and said, "As a matter of fact, you don't smell like jasmine at all. You smell like *roses!*" He sniffed at Ahern, who, as you may recall, had only recently been well manured by Randy and added, "*You* smell like roses too. Egad! Everything's coming up roses for me and my germs!"

"Doctor Fang!" Regina gasped. "You've got it!"

"I always knew I had it," Fang answered modestly. "It's just that girls never looked beneath my drab exterior and—"

"Idiot!" raged Ahern. "You've got the Aphroditic Plague!"

"Idiot yourself, you big dope!" Fang snapped. "I *can't* have the plague because I've got the Diego factor and all that there like jazz, so there!"

"But Docky-wocky!" Regina insisted. "You said yourself that you only this morning succeeded in mutating your germs a step further. Isn't it possible that this new pneumonic strain is capable of infecting *everybody?*"

"Maybe." Fang frowned; then his face brightened and he added, "Egad, I'm a genius! I've isolated a germ that will wipe out everybody on earth. I'll be remembered in the history books as the man who wiped out the human species!"

"You will?" Regina marveled. Then, not wishing to debate who would write the books, let alone who would be around to read them, she said, "Quick, Doctor Fang! You've got to administer some Terramycine to yourself before it's too late!"

Gazing admiringly at Regina's lush nude body spread-eagled on the torture thigamajig, Doctor Fang, creep of the universe and very sexy guy all of a sudden, said, "It's already too late, and I'm *glad!*"

At that moment, and like, just in time, a shot rang out

and the fiendish Fang, literally caught with his pants down, fell to the floor with a moan of frustrated fiendishness. Randy Kidd, running over to make sure Fang was dead, smiled at Regina and said, "Looks like we got here just in time."

"Looks like," Regina murmured, regaining her cool. "Also looks like I'll never find out if it's true what they say about Chinese boys. By the way, who's *we?*"

"Fudd, here, British Intelligence," said Gaylord Fudd, stepping into the light with a much-abashed Cynthia/Felicidad and so forth, who was once more wearing her wig and cardboard-gray contacts.

"Miss Forsyth, or perhaps I should say Fudd," explained Randy, "is Colonel Fudd's long-lost daughter. The one who was kidnapped by disgruntled DPs while he was serving in the British Army of Occupation in Germany shortly after the war."

"I read about it." Regina nodded. "Would somebody please untie me? I mean, I'm fascinated to hear about how you found little Cynthia and all that, but this is hardly the most comfortable torture thigamajig I've ever been thonged to, and it's embarrassing, too."

"Eck-chooly," Cynthia Fudd explained as she and Randy untied the Blue Queen, "I was raised in a Bavarian beer hall by Neo-Nazis—or perhaps I should say, *old* Nazis you people never caught."

"Rather fortunate I chanced to recognize the strawberry birthmark on her, ah, chest, during the struggle for the gun," said Gaylord Fudd. "My daughter, having been brought up to hate our side, was a confirmed Neo-Nazi and had infiltrated British Intelligence solely to kill me, should the occasion ever present itself."

"Eck-chooley," Cynthia cut in, "I'm ever so glad Daddy recognized me. I was so absobloodylutely bored with Lowenbrau and now I shall be able to wear Carnaby Street styles with a feeling of full identification and—"

"Oh, shut up!" Randy growled, pulling Regina from the cross timbers and wrapping her in his jacket.

"What did I say?" Cynthia asked plaintively.

"Come, child," Gaylord Fudd told his daughter, who, as Lei Mi, had found out where the place was, and so forth. "Can't you see that Randy and Regina wish to be alone?"

"But he is squeaky-clean, and I love him, Father!"

"I know, Daughter, but it is a far, far nobler thing to leave them alone at last than . . . besides, it's teatime."

It wasn't until they'd seen Captain Ahern off and found Regina's clothes, and fresh makeup, that the Blue Queen asked Randy why in the world he'd treated poor Cynthia So Forth so ungallantly.

"She did save the universe from Doctor Fang by leading you and her father to his hideout, you know, Randy darling."

"I know." Randy shrugged. "But, well, she *bugs* me!"

"How so, my poor bugged buddy?"

"Well, I, ah, made friends with her while she was pretending to be Baby Jane Dough, and then we, ah, met as myself and Cynthia. And then I, ah, got to know her as Lei Mi, see?"

"She was also the girl at the pool, remember?"

"Oh, I figured that out, once I thought about the fact that she still had her pink dress after telling me, as the American kook, that she'd seen herself, as Lei Mi, jump the rose bushes. But that's not what bugs me. What bugs me is my *score!*"

"Your *what?*"

"My score. I mean, do I count her as one conquest or as three?"

"I see what you mean," mused the Blue Queen. Regina thought about it, and then she shrugged and said, "You had to work just as hard as if you'd, ah, made your usual arrangements with three separate girls, didn't you?"

"Sure. And you know what? I really though they were three different girls."

"In that case," Regina soothed, "you just go right ahead and count them as three conquests, Randy baby."

"I guess I can, at that." Randy brightened. And then he frowned and added, "Too bad I didn't get anywhere with her while she was being Felicidad, the dame at the pool, or the kooky Neo-Nazi broad. I mean, I wonder what they'd have been like in bed!"

the end (thank god!)

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